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# ***Wrestling Observer Newsletter***

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PO Box 1228, Campbell, CA 95009-1228

1994 – STATE OF WRESTLING

FEBRUARY 14, 1994

With the World Wrestling Federation out of the country this past weekend, as it will be for much of the next two months, and World Championship Wrestling running no major house shows over the weekend, it was Eastern Championship Wrestling that took the real center stage of the weekend's pro wrestling activity.

The Philadelphia group put on what numerous readers called the best house show from any promotion in years in Philadelphia, and what seems to have been the most highly regarded house show in North America so far this year (that's a lot fainter praise that it sounds if you think about it), selling out the small ECW Arena, estimated crowd with sets of extra bleachers put into the building in excess of 1,300 (tickets \$25 and \$12) on 2/5 for a triangular match with Sabu, Terry Funk and Shane Douglas with Funk's ECW title at stake. The match went to a legitimate 60:00 draw with no falls taken and was rated between \*\*\*1/2 and \*\*\*\* by various readers. After momentary hesitation, the crowd gave the three men, all technically heels, a standing ovation for their performance, causing both Funk and booker Paul E. Dangerously to remark that they had finally reached the level of a Japanese audience. Douglas was actually the only one of the three to do the 60:00, as various angles created during the match took both Sabu and Funk out of the ring for various periods of time. Another match on the show pretty well universally given \*\*\*\*+ was a brawl all over the building between The Public Enemy and Bruise Brothers which saw Bruise Brothers pretty well destroy the arena before losing at the end, knocking down literally everyone (including several fans) and everything that got in their way. In addition, The Sheik, in his late 60s, wrestled his first match in the United States in several years, teaming with Pat Tanaka to beat Kevin Sullivan & Tazmaniac when Sheik threw a fireball at Tazmaniac. It appears, based on post-match interviews, that the next step is a 3/5 show in the same building headlined by a Funk vs. Douglas I Quit match.

FEBRUARY 21, 1994

Smoky Mountain Wrestling "smoked" its previous records 2/13 with a show at the Knoxville City Coliseum entitled, "Sunday Bloody Sunday" after the U2 song of the same name drew 3,950 fans and a \$31,800 gate. The previous records for the two-plus year old promotion were set in the same building on 8/22/93 drawing 2,780 fans and \$18,200.

Six of the seven matches on the card were heavily pushed on television, with the show that aired over the weekend being nothing more than a one hour review of all the angles and how they were peaking for blow-offs on the show. While the depth of the show was a strong factor in setting a record during a weekend of largely inclement weather (although Knoxville itself didn't have it as bad as many other cities in that part of the country), from those in attendance, the two main matches that drew were a Texas death match between The Bullet (Bob Armstrong) and Terry Funk, and a chain match for the SMW title between Dirty White Boy and champ Brian Lee. In the Bullet vs. Funk match, the stipulations were that if Bullet lost, he would have to unmask and leave SMW forever and crawl across the ring and kiss Jim Cornette's feet. Dory Funk was scheduled to be in Terry's corner for the match. In the chain match, White Boy had gone on television and swore to God that he would win the title and said that Ron Wright (who had been out of SMW since an angle where Brian Lee jumped off the top rope on his knee) would walk to the ring. In addition to those matches, the key matches included a cage match with The Moondogs vs. Bruise Brothers, an SMW tag title match with Heavenly Bodies defending against Rock & Roll Express, another stipulation match with a football helmet on a pole with Bodies vs. Doug & Mike Furnas with the Furnas Brothers having to wear Alabama football jerseys (having played in college at the University of Tennessee, Alabama being a main rival of UT) if they lost and Tracy Smothers vs. Chris Candido which had been pushed with a series of television angles.

The Smothers-Candido match, rated \*\*1/2, in which Candido won after using a chain, was the only match where the babyfaces didn't go over at the end. In the opener, rookie Anthony Michaels pinned The Hornet (Brian Keyes) in a \* match. Smothers-Candido followed. Furnas Brothers vs. Bodies went next. It turned into a four-way when Cornette tried to climb the pole. The Rock & Roll Express showed up and pulled Cornette down and Ricky Morton climbed the pole and got the helmet, threw it to Doug, who used it on Tom Prichard, who was then pinned. Match was rated \*\*1/2 because unlike the previous matches Mike Furnas was in where they literally rehearsed his every move ahead of time, this time his lack of experience was more obvious as he looked lost in several spots. Bullet-Funk, which, based on crowd reactions, seemed to be the one most responsible for drawing the house, was a wild \*\*\*1/2 death match going four falls. At one point Funk gave Bullet a DDT on a ringside table, which broke and both went through the table to the floor. At another point Dory came to ringside and threw Terry the branding iron which he used to gain a fall. At one point Funk threw part of the broken table and five chairs into the ring and proceeded to hit Bullet in the head with all six items of furniture. Funk, who juiced heavily, did the first (and probably last) moonsault of his career, stacking part of the broken table on top of several chairs, putting Bullet's body on top of the table and going off the top with a Sabu-style moonsault. Bullet was actually supposed to move, but didn't move fast enough and was hit with the move and they did a pin. Later Bullet DDT'd Funk on the same table for a fall, which proved to be the final fall as Funk failed to answer the bell for the fifth fall. Immediately Cornette cracked Bullet with the racquet and as Dory & Terry held him, they dragged him over to Cornette who demanded that he kiss his feet. Just as the Funks were about to force Bullet to kiss Cornette's feet, Smothers and Michaels hit the ring and the Funks and Cornette left. The Rock & Roll vs. Bodies title match which followed was the only disappointment on the show, going just 4:00 with the simple Cornette interference DQ to save the title although the match was hot during its brief tenure, rated \*3/4.

In the chain match, which naturally featured double juice, rated \*\*\*3/4, the finish saw both men hit three turnbuckles. At this point Tammy Fytch tried to spray White Boy, but ref Mark Curtis cut her off and the hair spray went into the air. At this point Ron Wright came to the ring, walked to ringside, tapped his cowboy foot three times (the old loaded boot gimmick that Wright used in the old Knoxville territory in 1971-72), and kicked Lee in the head, with White Boy falling into the fourth corner to get the win and the title. Wright's appearance during the excitement of the finish was the biggest pop on the show. It was up to the Moondogs and Bruise Brothers to finish the show in a cage match, which was somewhat anti-climactic, but still rated \*\*3/4 since several chairs found their way into the cage, there was four-way juice and a wild post-match. After the match the Bodies got into the cage and did a 4-on-2 on the Bruise Brothers, until the Rock & Roll came in to even the odds. Bob Armstrong, sans mask, came out as well, as commissioner, during the run-in.

APRIL 4, 1994

Editorial time. Subject: Pro wrestling media, whatever that is meant to constitute and it covers whomever considers themselves part of it. Contrary to what would seem to be popular belief among some, if one travels to California, one does not have to bring a passport. And when one comes from the United States and lands at the Los Angeles or San Francisco Airport, they don't have to go through customs, although it would seem that way when it comes to coverage of IWC/AAA. Since the first IWC/AAA shows back last August, the success of this promotion in California caught most everyone in wrestling by shock. It shouldn't have to an extent since during the summer of 1992, Lucha Libre shows at the Cal State-Los Angeles Gym were the biggest grossing shows in the United States except for very few major market WWF shows and its PPVs, topping out at a \$120,000 house for the July 4th show. Even so, I don't know of anyone who follows wrestling closely with one exception who wasn't shocked out of their socks that

first weekend when the Sports Arena was sold out and turned away 8,000 fans, the best showing for a pro wrestling card in the largest state in the United States in 22 years.

This is not an editorial saying that Lucha Libre is great wrestling. Just like any form, some is good, some is bad and most is in between. Today I believe AAA has the most innovative inside-the-ring wrestling in the world, but innovation goes in cycles based on when young guys who aren't bound by tradition get a chance to expand past old limitations in their entertainment craft and are put in a position to be allowed to do so. As they got older, and smarter, they also get more routine and less creative. Right now AAA is loaded with creative young workers who are exploring new in-ring horizons and in many cases, coming up with new moves and new spots, some of which will become popular in the future, just as New Japan did in the 1980s before it was overtaken by older wrestlers limiting new creativity. One of the reasons this is the case is because AAA is the youngest major promotion in the world, having debuted in May of 1992. A few years from now, another company will be loaded with talented young wrestlers and the same thing will occur. Every wrestling fan is entitled to form their own opinion about what they enjoy, what they'll support and what entertains them. Opinions are all subjective. If someone has a good time at a show that doesn't draw any fans, that doesn't make them wrong. However, eventually a normal entertainment business (a category WCW doesn't fall into since it's being bankrolled and normal business practices of having to be profitable seem not to part of the equation) to survive at a major level has to garner enough interest to turn a profit or it won't be around. I learned this years ago having a great time supporting pro sports franchises that didn't draw enough fans. It didn't matter in the long run if the people attending had a good time or not if not enough people attended, because if that was the case, economics would determine that it wasn't going to last no matter how much fun those attending had. Similarly, you can be bored to death with an entertainment event, but if you see the building consistently filled, you know you've got plenty of opportunities to be bored to death in the future because they'll be coming back. My point is that if you are a fan and you don't like a style of wrestling, that is your prerogative. If you are a student of a particular business--which those in decision making positions in this business should be or they'll eventually make a lot of bad decisions that could have been avoided by knowledge of what has been tried elsewhere and succeeded and failed, or a reporter covering a business, and you aren't a fan of a style or promotion, that is also your prerogative. However if you ignore the existence or ignore coverage of something different that is successful based on that factor, you are closing your mind to learning about your own subject, and thus, not doing your job. The only thing that stays the same in wrestling is that it always changes. And the day someone stops accepting that as fact is the day that the business has passed them by.

I'm not sure what wrestling media constitutes. Are pro wrestling magazines wrestling media, or are they purely there own form of entertainment in which real reporting has little or nothing to do with it? Are newsletters wrestling media? A few are for sure, but how many really are? A reporter on this subject should have working knowledge of all significant aspects of pro wrestling or at least make an attempt to. If gaining a working knowledge of the subject, not the subject as it was in 1985, or as you wish it would be because that's how it was when you were a kid, but as it is in 1994, is not a concern, there's nothing wrong with that either if you don't consider yourself a serious reporter on a subject.

AAA is a significant part of the American pro wrestling landscape. Significant for two reasons. One is because of the crowds it has drawn and the television audience it has--ethnic to be sure, and I'm exceedingly skeptical of its chances of gaining popularity outside its ethnic group--but large enough in number that it can no way be viewed as anything less than the third most popular promotion in the country, and second most popular when it comes to presenting live events. It is also the most popular promotion in the second largest city in the country, even outdrawing WWF by a wide margin. It is significant also because it is completely different than any other style of wrestling, which means there is more to learn from it because of those differences. Because it wasn't a significant part of the U.S. wrestling scene years ago doesn't change this fact today. If anything, it accentuates it. If its gain in significance is shunned off by saying it is because there are more Hispanics than ever before in this country, that

would be to blind oneself to a significant change in the demographic make-up of our country, that by all estimates is going to only increase as the years go by, thus being blind to eventual change in our society. If one was doing a wrestling magazine or newsletter in England, would ignoring coverage or not attempting to gain a working knowledge of WWF or WCW wrestling be justified because the companies are based in a foreign country and the style is different than what was previously the norm in that country be justified? No. It would be burying ones head in the sand and not coming to grips with the reality of the present. In Japan in 1984 when the first UWF started doing shooting style, a style completely unfamiliar to everyone, most fans and reporters didn't initially understand it. Was it ignored at the beginning? By and large it didn't even draw that well but it had a rabid Tokyo following among high school aged kids. Because of that everyone learned what it was. Those that didn't got left behind. By 1988 a promotion using that style was the hottest promotion in the world. The reporters there were no different from here. They grew up watching another style. Generally they didn't like change and didn't like the style of the promotion. I'm sure many reporters and fans in Japan still don't like it, and there is no reason they should, but they don't ignore it. And a few years later, that promotion heavily influenced the traditional style promotions' ring style as it is today--virtual elimination of screw-job endings, heavier emphasis on submissions making constant high spots not necessary for false finishes, etc. AAA is not as popular in the United States as WWF is in England, so ignoring it as a subject in this country isn't as preposterous as ignoring WWF in England would be. Dissing the AAA audience for being almost exclusively of one ethnic group is still not a valid reason for ignoring it unless one would approve of the idea of a black reporter or a Mexican reporter considering themselves a serious wrestling reporter and then doing a newsletter or writing for a magazine and choosing not to cover SMW, or even WWF because so few people of his ethnic origin attend the shows. While the company being based in Mexico City (although the IWC is American), it is a very successful American promotion on a regional basis. It may never expand its demographics. In fact, it won't. But it's already here and already has made its mark. To not be able to recognize that is to not be paying attention to what is going on. This is not a situation of saying that certain things are going to change in this business because of an eventual 500 channel television system as they did more than a decade ago when cable took hold, and to be ready for what is coming so when it's here you'll be ready before it catches on. This is already here. If you're a reporter covering this industry and don't have a working knowledge of this promotion, you're in danger of becoming out of touch with your business.

MAY 16, 1994

Atsushi Onita added another line to his resume applying for the position as one of the biggest drawing cards in pro wrestling history on 5/5.

After vowing to retire if he lost, thereby putting the result of his main event match with Genichiro Tenryu in question, Onita's Frontier Martial Arts-Wrestling (FMW) promotion drew a legitimate standing room crowd of 52,000 with thousands more turned away at the gate, and more than \$2 million at the Kawasaki Baseball Stadium in a show to celebrate the fifth anniversary of the promotion. The show broke the promotion's all-time attendance record of 41,000 set one year earlier to the day in the same venue for Onita's match with Terry Funk. It was the 14th show in pro wrestling history to top the \$2 million mark in live gate receipts.

The retirement vow, made on several different occasions was probably the key in putting the first singles "dream match" between Onita and Tenryu over the top with casual fans. Most of the hardcore fans realized that Tenryu was going to win, even though it was Onita's specialty gimmick match. It was simply returning the favor for Tenryu putting Onita over clean in a tag team match on a WAR show on 3/2 at Tokyo Sumo Hall. Then, of course, Onita would come up with some sort of a gimmick to enable him to return. Casual fans, having never seen that angle, popped for it because while they would have "expected" Tenryu to win to even the score, Onita throwing the retirement line changed the equation since they didn't think Onita would break a vow. If he had broken the vow, while Onita would have put millions in his pocket book in one night, it could have put his future

in danger in a country that places such a high premium on its native athletes keeping their word.

Officially, after the requisite explosions and juice from both men, Tenryu won in 23:55, finally scoring a pin after five attempts at pins with power bombs in a match described as slightly better than average. The result evened the score from Onita pinning Tenryu with a power bomb in their tag meeting when Onita teamed with Tarzan Goto against Tenryu and Ashura Hara.

It was the fifth show that Tenryu had been in the main event of that drew in excess of 50,000 fans. This ties him with only Hulk Hogan as having been in the main event of that many shows that have drawn more than 50,000 fans. Tenryu's other four were singles matches against Antonio Inoki (Tokyo Dome '94) and Riki Choshu (Tokyo Dome '93) and tag matches with Choshu against Inoki and Tatsumi Fujinami (Fukuoka Dome '93) and with Tiger Mask (Mitsuharu Misawa) against Choshu and George Takano (Tokyo Dome '90). That statistic is amazing only because most of the greatest drawing cards in the history of wrestling (Buddy Rogers, Gorgeous George, Jim Londos, Strangler Lewis, Dusty Rhodes, Bruiser Brody, Ray Stevens, Freddie Blassie, Giant Baba, Dick the Bruiser, Verne Gagne, The Crusher, Nobuhiko Takada and Bruno Sammartino) don't have even one crowd of 50,000 to their credit and a few hardly legendary names who do (Willie Wilhelm and Shota Chochyashvili, who headlined Tokyo Dome shows against Akira Maeda and Inoki respectively). Besides Tenryu and Hogan, only Choshu (four), Inoki (four), Fujinami (three), Lou Thesz (two) and Ultimate Warrior (two) have more than one to their credit. But those figures say something that isn't the truth. Tenryu is a famous wrestler and in an interpromotional "dream match" situation has a great track record, but on his own he is not the kind of a draw that a Hogan or an Inoki or a Choshu or many others were or is.

After the match, Onita's future as a wrestler became the main topic. At the building when the match was over, an announcement was made to try and soften the blow, saying Onita, 36, had only said he would consider retirement upon losing, which actually would be nothing new since Onita has talked of retirement in house show interviews for the past 16 months citing all the punishment he's taken in the ring since debuting as a wrestler at the age of 15. Onita actually first retired back in 1984, when he was an All Japan mid-card junior heavyweight, due to a serious knee injury, only to resurrect his career in his own blood'n'guts promotion less than five years later. But behind the scenes came the "secret" story, that Onita's latest goal is to run for the Japanese Senate ala Antonio Inoki. While Onita's plan is that he would stick around for one year to fulfill "dream matches" such as a proposed upcoming match with Inoki, this would enable him to make the transition from pro wrestling but maintain his cult celebrity status. The rumor of Onita running for the senate picked up so much steam in the days after the match that at a press conference on 5/9 in Tokyo, Onita denied it and announced he would be retiring in one year with his final match on May 5, 1995 at Kawasaki Baseball Stadium, copying Inoki's extended retirement theme. Nevertheless, Onita's statements did nothing to quell the speculation that he would follow in Inoki's political footsteps.

The idea that Inoki, who always had a controversial business past but somehow maintained enough respect and popularity as a national sports hero, largely among the kids who grew up in Japan with him in prime time every Saturday night beating any and all comers as their favorite television sports star, could squeak into political office is one thing, which probably is embarrassing in some circles. However, the way Inoki handled himself and what came out once he got there only led to more controversy.

But the idea of Onita, who is a mainstream celebrity but of a far more bizarre fashion, not an athletic hero at all but a guy who sliced and diced his way into millions running "garbage" wrestling shows to an audience that would be labeled as far more lowbrow, going into politics is even more bizarre, but no more so than Onita being a national spokesperson for AIDS awareness.

If Onita's political goals don't transpire and he sticks around as a full-time wrestler for more than one year, this has a good chance of affecting his popularity. In Japan, statements of this type are meant to

be honored. For example, in 1983, when Terry Funk retired, at the time he was the most popular foreign wrestler in the country. After he returned about a year-and-a-half later, his popularity was never the same. He remained a wrestler with name value and was popular, and always will be in that country, but no matter how hard he worked in late 1984 when he returned, the crowds still held back and his popularity never got near the old levels because of the belief fans had that Funk broke his word.

As often happens in wrestling, that may be a lesson that should have been learned by Onita, who copied much of his act from Funk, from the overall intensity of his performance, to the juicing of various body parts to the crying interviews after grueling matches. On one hand it may be worse for Onita because the Japanese fans traditionally have a lot less patience when a Japanese wrestler dishonors his word or his sport than a foreigner, who is almost allowed and expected to (what hurt Funk was by 1983, he was pretty much accepted as being an honorary Japanese). The one advantage Onita may have in all this is that his audience may be more forgiving and forgetting.

The FMW anniversary show was the first of three major shows in a three-day period in the Tokyo metro area as part of "Golden Week." The first week of May is a period where virtually all businesses shut down and workers are encouraged to go on vacation with their families. This has become a traditional week to run major shows, particularly New Japan and FMW. Of course New Japan opened Golden Week on Sunday in Fukuoka, a city some ten hours from Tokyo, drawing an announced 53,500 fans (a figure that may be somewhat but not heavily inflated). After the FMW show, UWF ran the quarterfinals of its Best of the World '94 tournament the next night in Budokan Hall, drawing a legitimate sellout 16,500. The night after, the WWF invaded the Yokohama Arena for the first of a four-show Japan-Mania tour, drawing an estimated 4,000 (announced as 8,056) fans, or about a one-quarter house and the smallest crowd for pro wrestling ever in the building, headlined by Bret Hart retaining his WWF title beating Randy Savage in 17:38 with a sharpshooter submission.

Complete results of the show, which was largely described as a good card: 1. Tetsuhiro Kuroda pinned Gosaku Goshogawara in 9:28; 2. Battle Ranger & Koji Nakagawa & Masato Tanaka of FMW pinned the Michinoku Pro trio of Great Sasuke & Hanzo Nakajima & Shiryu in 18:49 of a Lucha style match when Ranger pinned Nakajima; 3. Another mixed promotion match was Combat Toyoda & Crusher Maedomari & Shark Tsuchiya over FMW win over the LLPW trio of Eagle Sawai & Noriyo Tateno & Mitsuki Endo in 14:44 when Maedomari pinned Endo; 4. Sambo Asako & Mr. Gannosuke beat Goro Tsurumi & Hideki Hosaka in 12:24 when Gannosuke pinned Hosaka; 5. In a martial arts match, resident FMW retired kick boxer and "enforcer" Katsuji Ueda knocked out wrestler Katsutoshi Niiyama in 1:43 of round three; 6. Sabu, working with two broken hands and a possible torn tendon in one of them, naturally didn't miss the show, teaming with Damian to beat Dr. Luther & Michinoku Pro's Yone Genjin in 15:14 when Damian pinned Genjin. Damian is over as a comedy figure since he screams out the name of famous wrestlers like Tenryu or Choshu and then does their signature moves and everyone laughs; 7. Megumi Kudo retained her WWA and World Independent womens title beating All Japan's Yumiko Hotta in an interpromotional match in 16:48 which is one of those travesty of justice results that shows All Japan is willing to play the game and have their women put over inferior women in order to maintain the cooperation with other offices that enables them to draw their own big houses; 8. Big Titan & The Gladiator & Ricky Fuji, known in FMW as Team Canada (even though only Titan is actually Canadian), beat the WAR trio of Gedo & Jado & Hiromichi Fuyuki in 15:06 when Gladiator pinned Gedo. During the match Titan & Gladiator accidentally hit one another with clotheslines to start what appears to be a break-up. After the match Gladiator walked out on Titan and Fuji with Fuji grabbing the house mic asking why and Titan saying he didn't know; 9. In an match that could only been won via knockout, Terry Funk defeated The Sheik in 5:59. This was said to have been a good match which is double amazing, since Sheik rarely went 6:00 even in his prime, and now he's pushing 70 and can barely move. Sheik threw fire and burned Funk's leg after Sabu had poured lighter fluid all over his leg. It looked really dangerous and Funk juiced heavily. The crowd chanted for both men since Sheik is over as a character babyface. Funk made the comeback and won when Sheik went to throw fire again, Terry kicked his hand and the fire

got all over Sheik, and he couldn't answer the bell; 10. Mr. Pogo & Hisakatsu Oya retained the World Brass Knux tag team title in a street fight beating Tarzan Goto & Mitsuhiro Matsunaga in 16:38 when Oya pinned Matsunaga after a back suplex after Pogo blew the fire on Matsunaga once again; 11. Tenryu pinned Onita.

AUGUST 1, 1994

AAA wrestling promoted by the IWC returned to the United States this past weekend for debut shows at the Rosemont Horizon in Chicago and the Paramount in New York. While the weekend wasn't profitable due to the high cost of putting together shows of this type, they once again shocked the wrestling world drawing houses just under \$100,000 each night and based on what we hear, the shows had hot action and even hotter crowds.

The Chicago card on 7/23 drew 5,200 (4,425 paid) and \$97,000, with the crowd being hotter for the show than any show in the city in recent memory. The gate was slightly less than WWF did for the Wrestlemania Revenge tour (\$103,000) and WCW did for Spring Stampede (\$107,000) in the same building. The show was pretty much a break-even proposition and Ron Skoler, who heads the promotion of these shows was overall happy enough to want to return in the near future, but probably at the UIC Pavilion or the Ampitheatre because of easier access to the Mexican community in town. The main storyline item of the show was Love Machine & Eddy Guerrero capturing the AAA tag titles in their first night back from Japan from Octagon & El Hijo del Santo. Main event saw Konnan El Barbaro & Perro Aguayo & Cien Caras beat Jake Roberts & La Parka & Psicosis. Actually the Chicago figures if anything were a slight disappointment since the prediction a day ahead of time was a \$140,000 house, but it does blow to bits the argument that AAA would be unable to draw outside of Southern California (actually that argument never held water since they drew big houses twice in San Jose, but those making that argument seemed have never looked at a map thinking San Jose was in Southern California). The only negative is the crowd was so hot it got violent and three police officers were injured in trying to calm things down.

New York, however, was a surprise. The Paramount show drew 3,300 fans (2,800 paid) and \$99,000 (tickets were priced from \$25 to \$50--you'll hear much higher figures for the crowd elsewhere because by the end of the show so many more fans had arrived and the place looked almost sold out, but those were the box office figures), the best gate for a non-WWF show in years in the market and a bigger house than the past two WWF shows in the market. Still, the show wasn't profitable, although with something like \$16,000 in just a few days before the show, the promoters had to be thrilled to come out with only slight losses. New York was suspect because it has a much smaller Mexican population than Chicago and Galavision is only available in about 250,000 of the metro area's 5.5 million households, so based on exposure it would be equivalent to a WWF or WCW show, available on television in all households, drawing 60,000 fans. This group running infrequently in selective markets and eventual PPV shows is a potential goldmine, but not relying on Galavision nationally as it's carried by enough cable systems. They need local syndication in markets that have Spanish language television, like they have in San Jose and Los Angeles and like the old Los Angeles promotion had on SIN in the 70s, to be able to turn over the big profit. Didn't hear much about the show other than most felt Chicago was the stronger card, but New York was a good show with strong heat and work rate. Jake Roberts looked even worse than before on top, but with tag partners like Machine & Guerrero and Parka & Psicosis, they had a great match with Konnan & Aguayo & Caras. Told Konnan and Heavy Metal drew the biggest crowd reactions in New York, but it was the minis that stole the show. Tito Santana also received a big reaction although Too Cold Scorpio was really an unknown to the audience but worked well. Pedro Morales was honored before the main event, however it appeared only 10 to 15% of the audience had any idea who he was, but they were polite in reaction to him. I'm not certain whether or not either show was taped for television.

There was a lot of talk of putting on a show in Denver before the end of the year. While it isn't official, the plan right now is for a PPV show in November from San Jose (there definitely won't be a San Jose show in

early August) with WCW sharing in the promotion of the show and the tentative plans are for some AAA matches to appear on the WCW cable shows leading up to the event. Gary Juster of WCW was at the New York show, as was former wrestling promoter and current baseball owner Eddie Einhorn while AAA promoter Antonio Pena was in Orlando for the WCW PPV show, so you can expect some sort of tie-in to be more obvious over the next few months.

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Something funny happened at the end of the barbed wire match on 7/16 at the ECW Arena. After a bloodbath with the Funk Brothers vs. Public Enemy which ended with approximately 80 chairs in the ring, Terry Funk wrapped up in barbed wire with a garbage can stuck to his chest, and a brawl which went out of the building into the parking lot while dozens of the elderly were arriving at the building for their weekly Saturday midnight bingo (the ECW Arena doubles as a bingo hall), the fans gave both wrestlers and the show a standing ovation, and then chanted "ECW, ECW."

The folks who bring you it's not for everyone wrestling, Eastern Championship Wrestling in Philadelphia, ran their monthly card at the ECW Arena before about 850 of the hardest-core fans in the country. The converted bingo hall is even smaller and more dingy in person than it appears on television, and I don't see how you could put more than 1,000 in the building. But the ECW Arena is the closest thing crowd-wise to Korakuen Hall in Tokyo. Its fans don't care about faces or heels. They cheer and boo who they won't, not who they're told to. And they are more knowledgeable about wrestling than any other crowd in the country. Like only the top Japan groups and AAA, the promotion itself is over to its audience to the point where even the referees are over.

ECW isn't the wrestling of the past. It may not be the wrestling of the future. But it is right now the most innovative English language wrestling in the country, headlined by night-in and night-out the best performer in the country today, and that sure ain't Bret Hart. Or even Ric Flair. It's Sabu.

Sabu, who did a plancha into a Frankensteiner while doing a run-in earlier in the show, did his first stretcher job ever in Philadelphia against ECW champ Shane Douglas in the semifinal match. Sabu sat Douglas down in a chair outside the ring, then got in the ring and gave Douglas and the chair a tope. Douglas wound up still in one piece when it was over. The chair wasn't as lucky. There were the requisite broken tables from suplexes. There were old-style moves and new-style moves. Brutal chair shots. A cannonball dive by Sabu off the apron. It blew anything on the next night's PPV show away, as did the show as a whole when compared with the WCW show in Orlando. And then, as they were going to the finish, all the power went off in the building. This was no angle. About a minute later, the power came on, and it didn't take the two long to regain the killed momentum. Sabu set up a table vertically and put Douglas standing by it. He then did an Asai-moonsault, but Douglas moved and Sabu crashed into the table almost like moonsaulting into a wall. He was taken away on a stretcher after losing via count out, but not before local favorite 911 managed by choke slam Douglas, Mr. Hughes and valet Angel (who must have jumped six feet in the air before taking the bump) to the biggest pops on the show.

After taking literally forever to take the ropes down and do an FMW style barbed wire match, it was up to the Funks and Public Enemy to follow. Barbed wire matches are traditionally awful. What can you do but bleed? Somehow this didn't fit the bill. All four bled like crazy, but it would have been every bit as great without it. After brawling in the crowd, using wire cutters to take one side of the wire down and wrapping Terry up in it, and brawling outside the building, came Terry grabbing the house mic and asking for a chair. It was raining chairs within seconds, much as the raining pillows after the Muto-Vader match at the 1991 G-1 Climax tournament match. This was a little too dangerous, however. The wrestlers were being blindsided with chairs left and right as fans were throwing every chair they could find into the ring. All it would take is one bad throw and someone in the audience getting hit the wrong way, and the promotion would be having too many problems. For all its positives, we're not for everyone could have

been we're not for anyone with one fan who couldn't aim a chair hitting the wrong target. Somewhere amidst all this, Terry did a clean job, after which Dory destroyed the Public Enemy with one chair shot after another. Terry once again asked the fans to throw him a chair, and it was raining chairs again with chair shots galore. Finally, wrapped up in barbed wire, Terry left the ring with Dory while the Public Enemy was buried under a sea of furniture. When they finally got up, the fans, realizing the show was over, gave them, although it was really the show itself, a standing ovation. No, it's not for everyone. But for those who it is for, they give them a great show.

AUGUST 8, 1994

With all the hoopla surrounding both the trial and Hulk Hogan's winning the WCW title, the fact that one the biggest weeks of the year inside the ring for pro wrestling will have started a few days before most of you read this has pretty well been overlooked.

**New Japan** - Heading the bill is the fourth annual Grade One (G-1 for short) Climax tournament as the featured event of New Japan's five consecutive nights at Tokyo Sumo Hall. This year's 16-man tournament involves only native wrestlers, but all of the major names under contract to New Japan and several independents are involved. The five night scheduled seems to be a compromise idea. The idea of attempting to run consecutive nights in the same building, long thought to be promotional suicide except with a great set of attractions, started in 1987 when the company ran a junior heavyweight tournament and packed Sumo Hall for two nights in August. In 1991, New Japan created the G-1 Climax tournament, which started outside Tokyo, but finished with three straight nights at Sumo Hall. The first incarnation of the G-1 tournament, won by Masa Chono in the famous pillow-mania finish match against Keiji Muto, was so successful both inside the ring and at the gate that it almost immediately became of the annual highlights of the year and pretty well elevated Chono's status to the top level. In 1992, the G-1 tournament was also the tournament to recreate the old NWA world heavyweight title, again won by Chono, in a joint tournament with WCW. The tournament was considered a huge success, selling out all three nights at Sumo Hall and two other arenas. New Japan tried an even bigger gamble last year, running seven straight nights at the building. A total of 71,000 tickets were sold for a gate of \$3 to \$4 million over the seven days, which may have been the biggest week in dollar equivalents for any wrestling promotion in history. Four of the seven shows sold out the 11,500-seat arena, with the smallest crowd for the second night of the week doing just 7,500 fans, or the lowest New Japan crowd at Sumo Hall dating back to 1987 when the group was struggling and before the live attendance boom hit the country.

After that week, New Japan president Seiji Sakaguchi announced they'd be doing another seven straight nights this year, but the decision was made to limit it to five nights, from 8/3 to 8/7.

**Smoky Mountain Wrestling** - This promotion, which has been struggling of late at the box office, is expected to break its all-time record attendance and gate for its 8/5 "Night of the Legends" in Knoxville. The show is a variation of the Slamboree theme, the idea of which actually was even more successful on a regional basis for a similar show earlier this year in Memphis than it had been for WCW, since that area had its own regional stars pre-WWF expansion of 1984, that fans remember better than the stars from different territories brought into territories they didn't regularly work in as WCW did with Slamboree. The situation is somewhat different in Memphis, as the city's Monday night wrestling tradition has gone unbroken almost going back to the origination of mankind. In Knoxville, promoter Jim Cornette is tracing back local wrestling history through numerous different promotions dating back to the late 1960s. Over this past weekend, the group ran a one-hour television show designed to hype both the matches involving the local wrestlers and the announcements of the biggest drawing cards on a local level in the area. In a nice touch, not only did they talk about the wrestlers who would be appearing, but also brought up several big names and gave honest (believe me, and that is a rarity in this business) reasons of their status or why they couldn't be there, mentioning Prof. Boris Malenko (Larry Simon), who is in poor health, Ron Fuller (Ron Welch), who was the city's biggest drawing card for nearly 15 years as he doubled as owner of the local

Southeastern Championship Wrestling office, who they said was not expected to be there because of business commitments (he owns minor league hockey teams) and Jos LeDuc who they couldn't find. The only major names not really acknowledged were those currently in WCW (Robert Fuller, Jimmy Golden and Kevin Sullivan). But most of the big names of the past 25 years in Knoxville including some who will work the show like The Funks, Bob Armstrong, Ron Wright, Dick Slater, Bob Orton, Mongolian Stomper and Ron Garvin, and others such as Phil Hickerson, Frank Morrell, Don Wright, Jim White and relatives of passed away stars like Whitey Caldwell and Sam Bass are scheduled to attend. Cornette coincided the event, and a second major show in Johnson City, TN the next night, with "Fan Week," in which 50 fans, predominately readers of this publication, will be attending and travelling the circuit and having meetings set up with the wrestlers. I really wish I could have attended the first weekend because based on last year, the group really did a tremendous job in making the readers. The headline matches on the show are a Coward Waves the Flag match with Bob Armstrong & Tracy Smothers & Road Warrior Hawk with Ron Wright in the corner against The Funks & Bruiser Bedlam with Cornette in the corner, Dirty White Boy vs. Terry Gordy for the SMW title, Brian Lee & Chris Candido vs. Rock & Roll Express for the SMW tag titles and the return of the Heavenly Bodies in a street fight against The Thrillseekers. Knoxville City Coliseum holds about 6,500, with the group's all-time record being about 4,100 fans and roughly 3,950 paid for a show earlier this year.

**AAA** - In conjunction with Ron Skoler's IWC, the leading group in Mexico has its second show of the year at the Los Angeles Sports Arena, the building where it one year earlier shocked the wrestling world by drawing the largest crowd on the West Coast in 22 years. On 8/6 the show is headlined by a Parejas Increibles (enemies become partners) match with Konnan El Barbaro & Jake Roberts vs. Perro Aguayo & Vampiro Canadiense and a mask vs. mask match with minis Mascarita Sagrada vs. Espectrito which will almost certainly be the most important minis match in decades anywhere in the world when it comes to drawing money. Based on the history in Los Angeles, this card will probably draw one of the two or three biggest live gates thus far this year in North America (trailing only Wrestlemania at Madison Square Garden and the 3/12 Los Angeles show which did \$238,000; ultimately SummerSlam in Chicago will do better). Advance is roughly equal to the 3/12 show at this point. This show was plugged on WCW Saturday Night on 7/30, which won't sell any tickets but came off as a friendly political gesture, and is scheduled to get another plug on the Pro show on 8/6. Talks are continuing about doing a November PPV from San Jose in conjunction with WCW, although it would at this point only be using the AAA talent and the working idea is to include a major stipulation match with El Hijo del Santo vs. Eddy Guerrero. The PPV show will have both a Spanish and English language feed. I only hope WCW will be careful, because if they use their own announcers, the odds are great they'll neither know nor understand the personalities, gimmicks, storylines and moves unless they take a crash course (and this isn't something one can pick up that fast like Japanese wrestling). Based on past history in similar situations, the Japan Super Shows, that isn't going to happen, and there's no Jim Ross who will do enough preparation to at least get by. The reality is the vast majority will order the Spanish feed. There are a lot of behind-the-scenes problems regarding some top talent that are simmering based around the legit personal heat between Konnan and Vampiro which, if things aren't settled this weekend, could turn into a major story next week, and also change the face of the AAA shows in the United States in the future including the probability that Konnan won't be working the PPV show and that either Vampiro and/or Latin Lover will get a major push on the American shows.

**WCW** - The next round of World Wide tapings from Disney MGM are from 8/3 to 8/7, which will include both the 8/6 and 8/7 TBS shows being broadcast live. Hulk Hogan will be the focal part of the tapings of course, which will air on syndicated World Wide through November. Much of the future direction for the remainder of the year should at the very least be hinted about on these shows. A lot of what was talked about the promoted on interviews at the last Disney tapings actually never materialized, so I don't think they etch things in stone as they attempted to do the first time out, but they still throw out a lot of hints for the future.

**WWC** - Rounding out the list of major shows this weekend will be the Anniversary '94 weekend in Puerto Rico. The weekend opens with smaller "Anniversary" spectaculars on 8/4 in Humacao and 8/5 in Hatillo and the big show on 8/6 at Bayamon Stadium. The line-up for the show that they've been building toward for months features a ring surrounded by fire match with Hurricane Castillo Jr. vs. Eddie Gilbert, the Universal title vs. TV title with Dutch Mantel vs. Carlos Colon, Doomsday (Glen Jacobs) vs. Invader #1 in a battle of the heart punches, Rey Gonzalez & El Bronco defending the WWC tag titles against The Moondogs, Loser leaves town with Pulgarcito vs. Tahitian Warrior, Tuxedo match with El Profe (babyface manager) vs. Joe Don Smith (heel manager), loser goes to jail for one day with La Ley (Bossman gimmick but much worse) vs. Mohammad Hussein (who will play The Mountie role in this eventual skit), El Exotico, who is doing the 100-match losing streak gimmick, vs. referee Paco Lopez plus underneath are the Youngbloods, Gama Singh from Calgary and Fidel Sierra.

AUGUST 14, 1994

Paced by a tremendous job of hyping the show on television virtually all summer long, Smoky Mountain Wrestling set its all-time attendance and gate record on 8/5 in Knoxville for the "Night of the Legends," drawing 5,000 fans and \$40,000.

The show, the first part of "Fan Week" in which approximately 50 newsletter readers from around the country converged on the SMW territory for a week which included three major shows, was said to have been a tremendous live show, although our reports as far as a comparison point said it would be slightly behind Spring Stampede or Wrestlemania.

As much as climaxing several major angles, the draw was inducting more than two dozen wrestlers and personalities, including some who couldn't attend and had passed away, into the Knoxville Wrestling Hall-of-Fame. The local newspaper ran two large features the day of the show, on Ron Wright and Whitey Caldwell, the top heel and babyface in the city during the late 60s, early 70s era. Caldwell, who passed away in 1972 after an auto accident returning home from matches, was the subject of a "legends feature" a few weeks before the show on television. Announcer Les Thatcher had done a series of features, which ranged from good to exceptional for about two months leading to the show. The feature on Caldwell fit into the latter category to the point that many who never saw him or even grew up knowing about him were into honoring his memory. Wright, his leading rival, who was booked as the star of the entire card and named as the greatest wrestler in Knoxville history in a shoot fan balloting, presented the plaque to Caldwell's widow and children. Later in the main event, it was Wright's recovery from a powder throwing attack by Jim Cornette which led to Cornette waving the flag in the coward waves the flag main event of The Funk Brothers & Bruiser Bedlam losing to Road Warrior Hawk & Bob Armstrong & Tracy Smothers.

The show was Cornette's greatest success during what has to be by far the most stressful period he's ever had as a promoter and maybe has had in a lifetime. Coming into the show Cornette's territory, which had apparently sealed carving its niche into the local entertainment scene when they drew 4,000 fans to Knoxville in the spring, had fallen upon hard times when it came to both talent and drawing. While the alliance with the WWF had put money into Cornette's, and possibly the company's pocket, it had also exposed his manager character in a comedic way not conducive to helping his role as one of the prime draws and heat getters within his own territory which he'd receive much criticism for. Even more damaging is the WWF started cherry-picking his talent, including The Heavenly Bodies, his most valuable asset, and recently Brian Lee. It's admirable, and also accepting reality that Cornette appears to have little problem with wrestlers who leave his employment for much greener pastures, however this was something he was probably more worried about happening than anything when the first started the company, how if he developed new acts, if they got too much exposure and WWF or WCW saw them, that he'd inevitably lose them, which was why he originally didn't want any national coverage and exposure of his organization when he first started out. When the Bodies left, business took an immediate downturn. Tim Horner, who along with Sandy Scott had been one of

the prime forces in getting the group off the ground, had split with Cornette over several disputes and began wrestling on opposition shows in the market. He took the gamble on Jake Roberts, which ended up coming up as a losing hand. The same gamble, with the same result in an even shorter period of time, was the result of taking a chance on Chris Walker for Roberts' position as the top singles heel. One idea after another continued to go out the window due to wrestlers leaving for no apparent reason, wrestlers getting opportunities with major offices and leaving for obvious reasons and inopportune injuries such as the one suffered this past week by Chris Jericho of the Thrillseekers, who suffered a broken forearm practicing the shooting star press in a ring before the show in Knoxville, but still worked the show against vehement doctors orders. After the matches he had two steel rods and six screws put into the forearm and will be out of the ring for about six weeks.

Another gamble, the tag team of The Gangstas, has already become controversial before they've even made an impact on his territory. Entering the ring with their own security team, the duo of New Jack & Mustafa Saed paint "X" on the forehead of the wrestlers they beat and on a recent interview that hasn't aired on television yet mentioned how glad they were that Martin Luther King was killed. The Johnson City station ran a disclaimer over the weekend over their interview and bleeped out where they talked about putting the Reginald Denny on the white boys. A station in Tampa has already threatened cancellation of the show over the recent interviews. For years there has been debate on how far is too far in wrestling. Some have tried to argue that there should be no limits. The latter view is ridiculous because the marketplace at some point determines limits based on business. When one goes too far, and too far is not a term of taste as much as an economic reality of turning off more fans than turning on, it is the exact opposite of what a wrestling angle is supposed to do. When this results in smaller crowds, and numerous angles applauded and remembered by fans have actually hurt business (Eddie Gilbert running over Jerry Lawler and the WWF's original Papa Shango angle come to mind) as proven by crowds or television rating immediately falling off, the angle went too far. If the result is actually losing television stations, that's even worse. Thus far it is too soon to say anything about house show attendance because the Gangstas weren't a factor in drawing over the weekend, and there is a big difference between stations getting squeamish and actually pulling the plug, but it would be save to say when stations are complaining, it's a warning signal. There's also a matter of taste. Based on what I've seen, the first Gangstas interview was no different than any other heel interview insulting the crowd Cornette has used for year, only with blacks saying it, so there's nothing wrong with that, except for a few black racist references just as praising Louis Farakhan, which I found humorous, except for the line about congratulating O.J. because now there are two less of "them" to worry about. I groaned at that, not because of getting any heat, but because it reminded me of watching one of those embarrassing moments in the ring when inexperienced wrestlers screw up right in the middle of a high spot, momentarily freeze, and everyone in the crowd is forced to drop their suspension of disbelief. It sounded like a desperation plea that didn't work.

And finally, the day after his biggest success ever, his bait-and-switch tactics in major stipulation matches backfired during a Rock & Roll Express vs. Brian Lee & Chris Candido match where it was heavily and effectively promoted that either Ricky Morton's hair or Tammy Fytch's hair would be shaved bald depending upon who won the match. The end result was one of the biggest gates ever in Johnson City, but neither losing any hair.

One day earlier, none of that mattered. Cornette got to honor his own childhood, when he spent adjusting the antenna at his friends house in Louisville, KY at all hours of the day and night to pick up wayward signals of the Knoxville wrestling promotion. He got to honor his, and many in his audiences' childhood memories. Perhaps the most powerful late pitch on the television show the weekend before the card was Cornette, the top heel in the territory talking about honoring the memories of your parents and grandparents by paying tribute to these men, all gathered in one place for probably the last time. The reason Cornette did a more effective job of using history as a draw than WCW, and as effective as Memphis despite Memphis having the richer wrestling history and more powerful local icons connecting it like Sputnik Monroe, Lance Russell, Jimmy Valiant and of course Jerry

Lawler. Like the Memphis show (largely put together by Randy Hales), both groups were trying to draw fans using the legends, but the people who put the shows together were paying tribute to their own childhood memories.

Honored in a 30 minute ceremony were announcer-wrestler Thatcher, announcer Phil Raney, deceased announcer Jim Hess, referees Tommy Weathers, Mac McMurray and Ron West; promoter Bob Polk; and wrestlers Corsica Joe, Sara Lee, Dandy Jack Donovan, Frank Morrell, Billy Wicks, Nelson Royal, Rick Gibson, Mongolian Stomper, Jim White, Doug Furnas, Don & Al Greene (the original tag team that called themselves The Heavenly Bodies in the early 70s), Ron Garvin, Phil Hickerson, Bob Armstrong, Dick Slater, Bob Orton Jr., late manager Sam Bass (represented by his widow) Caldwell (whose wife was given the plaque by Ron Wright, his greatest rival during his career), deceased promoter John Cazana (represented by grandson Joey Cazana, an occasional jobber for the group), Ron & Don Wright.

The nearly four-hour show, in which Jim Ross was brought in as a guest announcer, also saw: 1. "Conan" Chris Walker pinned Richard Slinger of All Japan wrestling fame with a crossbody off the top rope. \*; 2. Doug Furnas pinned Killer Kyle with a Frankensteiner. \*1/2; The Gangstas were introduced and did an interview with Ross which got great heat as they basically insulted the audience. Ross said that some local television stations and the NAACP were mad about their comments and they called the NAACP a group of "trained Negroes;" 3. In a legends match, Orton & Slater, who were a top tag team in many Southeastern circuits in the late 70s and regarded as the best tag team in the world at one point in time, went to a double disqualification with Garvin & Stomper. The fans were into this match which was surprisingly good because of the work of Orton, who has lost a lot of weight. \*\*\*; 4. Rock & Roll Express regained the tag team belts they would lose and regain again over the next three days in a match with Lee & Candido. In this match, Tammy Fytch was handcuffed to Rick Gibson. Lee even worked a spot with a police officer who got a big pop shoving Lee down. Candido accidentally hit Lee with a leap from the top rope and Morton scored the pin on Lee. After the match, Fytch and Candido blamed Lee for the loss and Fytch even slapped Lee. Lee grabbed Fytch but Candido separated the two of them and Lee walked out on his own, flipping the two of them off. \*\*\*3/4; 5. Thrillseekers beat Heavenly Bodies in a bloodbath street fight. Jericho worked this match with the broken forearm that afternoon but still worked because it was such a major show. He bled buckets (those there said he bled more than the famous Hase-Muta matches), with puddles all over the ring and the floor. Finally the referee stopped the match on blood, but Jericho begged for it to continue and ended up pinning Jimmy Del Rey with a roll-up. \*\*\*1/2; 6. Dirty White Boy retained the SMW title beating Terry Gordy via DQ. Gordy looked bad. His punches and kicks looked weak and every fan realized it. Walker, who was being groomed for the top singles heel spot (and was fired two days later for no-showing his first title shot in Beckley, coming off the heels of a week where he had already missed two scheduled spot show appearances), did the run-in and both attacked White Boy until Rock & Roll made the save. 1/2\*; 7. In a Coward Waves the flag match, Hawk & Armstrong & Smothers beat Funks & Bedlam. Hawk came out on a motorcycle. They had built this match up showing clips from Starrcade '86 when Cornette took the bump off the scaffold (actually from Animal and Paul Ellering rather than Hawk but Hawk was given credit in the storyline). Cornette threw powder at Ron Wright and started waving Wright's flag, but the ref was distracted and never saw it. Finally Wright made the comeback on Cornette to the biggest pop of the show, and Cornette waved his own flag to defend himself against Wright which the ref saw and stopped the match. \*\*\*\*

Since Cornette started the territory a few years ago, most of his biggest houses have been drawn thanks to "either or" stipulation matches. Either one person leaves town or another. Either one person gets stripped or another. Either one person loses their hair or another. Either one person or team has to leave the territory forever or the other. While these matches have usually drawn well, the problem is that in several instances in the past, either or has resulted in neither. While Stan Lane left town, never to return, after losing a loser will never wrestle in the territory again, Bob Armstrong didn't. While the Heavenly Bodies left the promotion after the losing team is done for good in SMW match, they did work an angle for them to return

(commonplace in wrestling and virtually nobody who must leave "forever" ever leaves for that long).

Cornette as a promoter has long held out the belief that if the heel loses the either or match, then the stipulation must be enforced. His belief has been if the face loses, since the fans really don't want to see the face leave town (thus they can return under a mask) or get embarrassed in some way, that if the face gets screwed, you don't have to honor the stipulation because the fans are happy it doesn't happen. That game was played one time too many on 8/6 at "Fire on the Mountain '94" in Johnson City, which drew one of the larger crowds and gates SMW has done--1,800 fans paying \$15,000.

The either or title match saw The Gangstas do a run in while the ref was distracted, and Saed ran Morton's head into New Jack's head and Candido pinned Morton to regain the titles. The crowd was initially shocked since nobody believed Morton would ever lose his hair. Unfortunately, they were right. Morton argued and asked the crowd if he should get his hair cut. The belief was, since Morton had been screwed and since he is the most popular wrestler in the territory and since Johnson City is the city he's most popular in, that the crowd reaction to this was a lock. Why it wasn't, one can only speculate, other than fans had seen too many either ors become neithers and were upset believing it was planned to happen again. While the younger girls in the crowd screamed for Morton not to submit to the haircut, they were quickly drowned out by the majority who even began a chant for Morton to get his head shaved. They stalled for several minutes and Morton finally got in the chair, and then as the planned scenario, sprung out of the chair and attacked Lee & Candido, including a double dropkick on Candido. Morton got three or four swipes with the scissors on Candido before he fled. At this point there were a lot of boos because fans hadn't seen a haircut. Morton & Gibson went to the back and brawled with Lee & Candido back into the ring and got a little more of Candido's hair, but after the heels ran off, the Rock & Rolls were booed as they were left in the ring and those involved with the promotion including Cornette were freaking out about the reaction talking about having killed the town, which may be an overstatement although everyone pretty well accepted that what happened wasn't a positive. Supposedly the original plan was to shave Candido bald and I'm not sure why it didn't happen although it was suggested the two couldn't reach an agreement on price. In Mexico, where hair vs. hair matches are more prominent, wrestlers for years have told me stories about cities being killed when fans were screwed on hair vs. hair results, or when they'd shave the heel refs' head after he screwed the face in a hair match, and how usually the result was it would take more than a year to get the city back on its feet. That's one of the reasons Jerry Estrada was suspended for screwing up the haircut stipulation at the first TripleMania II. In this case, the idea behind this was a miscalculation. There is nothing inherently wrong with miscalculating how an audience will respond as that happens with every promoter. But there is something wrong with bait-and-switch advertising, morally and ethically (which obviously means nothing in this business), but also economically (which should mean something) and even legally. At its best, that's the category the promotion of this hair vs. hair match fell into.

AUGUST 22, 1994

The name National Wrestling Alliance, a decade after its fall from being the most prominent and dominant wrestling organization in the world, is back alive and in the middle of controversy. Well, the organization doesn't look alive, but the name is back.

The latest controversy around the NWA name and world championship belts stems from a tournament Tod Gordon of Eastern Championship Wrestling is promoting on 8/27 in Philadelphia at the ECW Arena. Gordon announced at his 7/16 house show in Philadelphia that he would be promoting an NWA world heavyweight title tournament, and originally announced it for Woodbridge, NJ but after much complaining from his loyal Philadelphia fans, switched it to the ECW Arena.

However, the NWA, at this point, doesn't approve. The NWA name, founded by several Midwestern wrestling promoters in 1948, quickly on the back of champion Lou Thesz and President Sam Muchnick became the most recognized wrestling championship in the world. The



NWA world heavyweight title has remained in existence largely in name only since the WCW/NWA first split-up in 1991 over Jim Herd stripping Ric Flair of the title making it the first title change that didn't take place in the ring since Orville Brown forfeited the title to Lou Thesz after a career ending auto accident in 1949, and second split in 1993.

The main thing that kept the organization of dozens of backstabbing wrestling promoters and promotions on several continents together until being destroyed from both the outside (by Vince McMahon) and from within (both by Jim Crockett's monopolizing the title in his quest to fight McMahon and by the membership at large being unable to work together and falling apart at the seams) in the late 1980s, was the world heavyweight championship, a belt so important that its holder was generally the top drawing wrestler and biggest money maker in the world during most of that period.

That title belt could be traced from the first champion, Brown, who forfeited the title to Thesz, who already held the much-recognized National Wrestling Association version of the title. In gaining power throughout the world, Thesz and Muchnick proceeded to gobble up regional versions of the title in numerous parts of the country although neither were totally successful in their goal of pro wrestling having just one recognized world heavyweight champion and the NWA completely controlling wrestling.

None of that matters today except the name still exists in a legal fashion. The last champion, and last controversy took place about one year ago. At the time, the NWA champion, one of two so-called world title belts recognized by WCW, was Ric Flair, who was scheduled to lose the title to Rick Rude at the Beach Blast PPV. NWA bylaws stipulate that the title can only change hands when given approval from the NWA board of governors, which didn't want to go long with WCW's wishes in approving the change. A court fight ensued prior to the Flair-Rude match, with the NWA asking in order to approve the switch to Rude, wanting the right to bring Rude in on another member promoter's show and lose the NWA title and belt to a wrestler of their choice, since the member promoters wanted the right to book Flair, who they perceived as a better draw, as champion to work their cards as would be their right under NWA bylaws. Ultimately, WCW prevailed in a court fight with the NWA so Rude didn't have to drop the title to a wrestler of the NWA board's choosing in the ring. When Seiji Sakaguchi was President of the NWA, after New Japan decided not to use or recognize the NWA belt after Keiji Muto lost the title to Barry Windham in early 1993 because of problems it was having working with WCW at the time, he signed over the rights to the title and belt to WCW, something unknown even to the NWA's own lawyer, Bob Trobich, which they didn't find out until they were in court. WCW ultimately dropped the NWA name from Rude's championship belt, and for a week, even dropped recognition of the belt before re-naming it the International world belt and dropping the NWA name.

Soon thereafter, Trobich attempted to remake the NWA and at a five-person convention in Las Vegas, created a new board, which would have control of the championship, made up of Steve Rickard of New Zealand, Dennis Coraluzzo and Crockett. At the time the only one of the three actually promoting was Coraluzzo, on a small-time basis mainly in New Jersey. Crockett has since promoted several shows this year and is attempting to put together a promotion in the Southeast. Gordon later joined the NWA but wasn't made a member of the board. An attempt by Jim Cornette to join was tabled because Crockett (who ironically today is working with Cornette) and Rickard felt it would be inappropriate for the manager of the WWF champion to be a member of the NWA since part of its bylaws had always been that its members would recognize no other wrestler as world heavyweight champion except the NWA champion.

Sound confusing and irrelevant to today's wrestling? It gets better. Gordon, working with Crockett's blessing and in fact claiming Crockett himself requested it, decided to run a tournament to create an NWA world heavyweight champion, reviving the title once again. Gordon said he was under the impression it was approval given by the board when Crockett made the suggestion to him. Others claim Gordon never sought out approval from the NWA board which controls the title before making the announcement. Either way, NWA sources tell us as

of press time, Gordon doesn't have approval to create an NWA heavyweight champion. After making the announcement, Gordon did attempt to make contact with Coraluzzo, both of whom consider the other as rivals because of the close proximity in which each runs indie shows. The approval of Coraluzzo and Crockett would give Gordon the majority needed to approve his tournament and his champion.

As of press time, Coraluzzo was against giving the tournament approval, but was willing to give in provided a contract is drawn up giving the other promoters dates on the champion, putting it in writing that the champion would agree to lose the belt in the middle of the ring when the board decides to make a change, and also wanting a voice in who would be made champion as his position on the so-called board gives him the power to do. As it stands, the tournament winner seems to be in the hands of Gordon and booker Paul E. Dangerously, although Crockett apparently has had input. Whomever the decision has been made to give it to right now, and there is someone picked, isn't of Coraluzzo's choosing. Rickard stated he wanted the matter discussed at the NWA convention, planned for mid-September, before he'd approve anything, which was Coraluzzo's back-up position. Crockett was unavailable to be reached at press time but those close to the situation believe he still wants Gordon to hold a tournament now and crown a champion although nobody could say they knew for sure, and that Crockett wanted the tournament winner to then come down either late this year or early next year to a Crockett show in his proposed new territory and drop the strap, which Crockett would then gain control of, like he had control of it for most of the 1980s when Ric Flair held the title. Of course the other NWA members are against one promoter holding complete control of the title. Gordon is still planning the tournament, which by the bylaws, without either Rickard or Coraluzzo's permission, he should have no right to do. Gordon claimed he's now getting the feeling he's being set-up, but that he's not going to be a party in what he called gamesmanship going around and said that he hasn't heard anything negative from anyone either representing the NWA or on the NWA board. He said he's going to run the tournament and crown a champion no matter what, and said that champion will be made available to Crockett or any other NWA promoter that wants dates on him. He's claiming a precedent was set a few weeks back when Crockett crowned his own NWA womens champ and then changed the title as well without either seeking approval of the board or informing any of the other member promoters of his plans. For whatever this is worth, based on the past, the NWA mens world heavyweight belt has been the only one under those restrictions because it was the one that was the key to the organization whereas so-called tag champs, womens champs, and lighter weight champs were always regional belts not defended on a worldwide basis. In fact, the middleweight and light heavyweight titles (which are still around with EMLL in Mexico) using the NWA name have remained in existence, probably without the knowledge of whatever else consisted of the NWA. Gordon also noted that he's the only NWA affiliated promoter that has a television show that is currently airing.

So even if Gordon doesn't get approval before tournament time, he's already said he's going to run the tournament and use the name anyway.

A ten-man single elimination tournament is at press time scheduled to include Shane Douglas, Too Cold Scorpio, Tazmaniac, 911, Dean Malenko, Chris Benoit, Osamu Nishimura and three others to be announced, one of whom negotiations are going on to be Road Warrior Hawk but he wasn't officially confirmed at press time.

The NWA legally could attempt to get a restraining order against the tournament and it is a trademarked name. Gordon appears to be banking that this won't happen, and he's probably correct. The NWA board already owes \$5,000 in legal fees from its losing case last year with WCW that it hasn't paid, and nobody seems to want to ante up the money to keep control of the name. By allowing the tournament to continue without approval and without a legal fight, the board is giving up its power over the name, and hence, years after it was the dominant name in wrestling, and after it truly no longer existed, the final burial of the NWA world heavyweight championship as it once existed, is scheduled to take place at the tournament billed to be its resurrection.

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The PPV show WCW will also work on in conjunction with AAA and Ron Skoler takes place on 11/6. It will be an AAA/IWC show without any WCW wrestling talent involved. It will be the first attempt to run an ethnic wrestling PPV wrestling show in this country, this of course being aimed at the Mexican-American audience.

Although originally announced for San Jose at the 5,800-seat SUREC Arena at San Jose State, at press time the site has not yet been confirmed and word we've heard is that San Jose is still the most likely site. As recently as late last week it had been expected to take place at the Grand Olympic Auditorium in Los Angeles (7,450-seat capacity) with a very outside chance of the event being held at the Los Angeles Sports Arena.

Like most WCW PPV shows, this is being scheduled for a 7 p.m. Eastern time start (4 p.m. Pacific) on a Sunday, lasting two hours and 47 minutes. This will be interesting to say the least because AAA major shows always run long, with the Los Angeles Sports Arena shows always lasting close to four hours and ending well after midnight and the first two TripleMania shows lasted longer than that. Unlike in the United States and Japan where wrestlers are pretty well given time restrictions before their match, in Mexico the basic idea is you go as long or as short as you need to get across what needs to be gotten across, which means, with the wrestlers in control of their own timing, the matches usually run long, so going live with time restrictions will be something new to many of the wrestlers. Reports we get are that WCW will attempt to not only promote the show to the Mexican audience but also to introduce the style of wrestling to the WCW audience through 4:00 long introductory segments every Sunday on the WCW Main Event show starting 9/4. The show will be broadcast on PPV, similar to a Julio Caesar Chavez fight, with both a Spanish and English language feed.

The entire card hasn't been able to be confirmed at press time although it appears to be a five-match show, all two-of-three fall matches with the exception of one of the two main events, which will most likely be a cage match, ironic since it will be pushed by WCW at the same time WCW will be pushing its own cage match on PPV two weeks earlier. The other main event, which has not been confirmed at press time thus can't be released as of yet will actually be a much more important match on the show when it comes to selling tickets to the base Mexican audience and would almost guarantee with correct promoting a sellout even in the larger Sports Arena and in virtually any arena AAA runs.

When Skoler began promoting AAA shows in the United States one year ago, his goal was to expand its base of popularity from the core Mexican population in cities close to the Mexican border with a history of Mexican drawing cards like Los Angeles, San Antonio (which had a show scheduled and canceled due to a poor advance) and Houston (which hasn't been run yet but has had a long history of drawing big houses using the top names from Mexico mixed with the regular Texas talent dating back to Blackie Guzman and Rito Romero in the 50s), to the major markets, in particular New York and Chicago. While the shows drew well at very high ticket prices in New York and Chicago, surprisingly well in New York, they ultimately weren't profitable because of the high expenses involved. Unlike virtually every medium-to-large wrestling promotion in this country which runs at some point at a financial deficit (WWF has generally been very profitable over the years but has had long periods in which it wasn't profitable), some smaller than others, none larger than the estimated \$6 million annual deficit of WCW, Skoler's backers are not long-time wrestling marks who are willing to lose money to have their faces be on television or to get put over in angles. They aren't businessmen wealthy to the point bottom line losses don't create an immediate concern about continuing. They are promoting wrestling to turn a profit now. The result has been less patience in developing and building than, say SMW or ECW, and a more frantic need for immediate results, which usually in these situations leads to things like odding on gimmicks and burning the gimmicks out, although it is too early to say that will be the case here. Fortunately for Skoler, they've largely gotten the immediate results because if they did the level of business SMW or ECW did, they'd be gone in a hurry.

However, when it comes to exposing the promotion to a new audience, even when it comes to new markets, this hasn't happened. The audience in New York and Chicago, like Los Angeles and San Jose, has consistently predominately of Mexican-Americans who are exposed to this group via Galavision cable (or in local Spanish stations in Los Angeles and San Jose), and a small smattering of hardcore fans. The attempted next step is really tricky, selling AAA wrestling to an English speaking audience.

It has been talked about from the start, but talks are more serious now than ever, to syndicate an English language one-hour show, which no doubt is the key. That's where the WCW relationship gets tricky. WCW and AAA are like the old TV-show, "The Odd Couple." On the surface, each benefits the other, but ultimately they risk driving each other crazy. Without examining the needs to each company, on the surface the relationship makes sense. AAA has tremendous potential in this country and WCW has the connections with TBS' syndication to television stations and PPV and knowledge of background in dealing within those industries to help them make the most of that potential. It's a win-win deal. Both draw from a different audience so they aren't direct competition, but both can benefit from learning from the positives of the other. AAA has new ideas and a new style never exposed in the United States and has a product that has proven in markets both abroad and domestic to be able to draw big money at the houses. It has been able to largely put on a quality of house show unmatched in this country and innovate and advance the actual in-ring style more in two years than WCW wrestlers have done in ten years. Making a business connection between the two and making it work would be a tremendous feather in Eric Bischoff's cap. He took a new idea and a new concept that nobody else in wrestling had bothered to try and made it successful. Forget that others actually introduced it to this country and had phenomenal success with it before he even knew it existed, in the long run, who will remember that if the product becomes a PPV staple? WCW has nicer looking television, a far cry from the dingy U.S. 60s look of AAA, experience at putting on great PPV shows that are timed out, and the aforementioned connections. So what's the problem?

Let's think of the next step. How does WCW introduce and promote AAA on its television? "Hey folks, here's Mexican wrestling. Isn't it cute? Look at all the guys in masks flying around." Doomed. Kiss of death. Remember the first TBS plug. "Our friends at Lucha Libre are running a show at the Los Angeles Sports Arena with Konnan and Perro Aguayo." While it was a nice gesture that WCW plugged the Los Angeles show twice on cable and several times on local syndication in Los Angeles, what was the result of all those quickie television plugs. Zilch. I didn't see so much as one unfamiliar non-Mexican face wandering around confused, or an unfamiliar face wandering around period. I didn't see even one curiosity-seeker who heard a WCW plug and decided to check it out. I'm not saying there wasn't one, but there weren't ten. The non-Mexicans at the Sports Arena were almost exclusively readers of this publication or Americans who are long-time fans from Lucha Libre exposure in the Los Angeles market on television.

The audience WCW was aiming those promos at will never buy a group of wrestlers they don't know, workrate and action be damned. And they'll never care about those they don't know unless a tremendously well done promotional campaign gets them hooked. If they are exposed to them, then maybe it'll gain popularity to some degree but there are no guarantees except that it won't happen overnight and probably won't happen without very careful planning and understanding, two things in short supply in WCW most of the time. Labelling it as a foreign wrestling product, just kills it that much deadlier. Don't think anyone at WCW has any real idea what the product is or why it works. More importantly than nobody having an idea of what it is today, because up to this point, nobody needed to, is that even today, does anyone care? How long has WCW attempted to work a deal with AAA or IWC? For months. In that period, how many WCW bigwigs who are making decisions in regard to promotion of and putting together this show have attended AAA shows live? The answer is one, Gary Juster, who watched the AAA show in New York. How much time have WCW announcers spent learning the names, the holds, the angles, the concepts to do a broadcast. Bischoff's been doing it with American wrestling for five years and he still can't call it. More importantly, how much time will they spend. I don't have an answer. It could be plenty,

but I'm betting that isn't the case, based on the preparation time done and announcing quality when WCW broadcasted the Tokyo Dome shows in the past. With the exception of Jim Ross gaining enough basic knowledge, not only did nobody have enough basic knowledge to fake their way through the broadcast and pull the show off semi-competently, more importantly is that nobody cared enough to learn it in the first place, the big boss topping the list. And as everyone familiar with both the Japanese and Mexican styles as compared with the American style knows, of the two, the Japanese style is a much easier for an American announcer to understand, to sell to a new audience and a much easier style to learn because there are far more similarities. And has been stated umpteen times, perhaps the single most important factor aside from promotion, product itself and a charismatic star to lead the way in getting a new style over is the announcers. There has been talk, although this isn't a done deal, that Mike Tenay of the Wrestling Insiders radio show who also does the WCW hotline, would do color on the broadcast and that Tony Schiavone would handle play-by-play. Tenay has followed Mexican wrestling dating back to the days of Mil Mascaras and has more working knowledge of AAA than anyone who speaks fluent English and has a broadcasting background with the exception of Dr. Alfonso Morales, who is unfamiliar with broadcasting to an American audience and to the best of my knowledge, nobody in this country even knows he knows English.

The best selling method to a new audience for this wrestling is to play-down the Mexican origins and play up the success in New York, Chicago and Los Angeles. A lot of the top guys are actually American citizens anyway. If an American audience believes it is successful in America, it can gain a decent amount of popularity even though dominated by Mexicans, although mixing in Americans with major name recognition would definitely help. The problem is, that detracts from the product and hurts core group popularity because few Americans with name recognition can work the style or mean anything to the core audience that already watches the product. Secondly, the basic anti-foreigner angle that is prevalent at any AAA show that Love Machine and Eddy Guerrero appear on would be hard to get across to an American audience, but eliminating it would be watering down the product to the core audience. The AAA entrance music, using popular music from not only the American and Mexican culture but other cultures as well, has to be eliminated on a PPV because the rights fees would make it impossible to use on those shows, which eliminates the Pavlov's Dog pops for ring introductions on the PPV show.

Numerous local wrestling promotions have used ethnic draws that wound up drawing money from more than just their specific ethnic group but from the mainstream as well. Ironically, this is also the exact opposite of how to sell it to the Mexican audience. Play up the positives. The speed. The flying. The futuristic style. The craziness. The pageantry. The American success. The youthfulness of most of the competitors (although Perro Aguayo hardly qualifies there). The problem is, on WCW television, you can only sell those points to a certain degree or else it then becomes competition to the main product. Playing up the speed or the hot moves too much on WCW exposes the lack thereof of the main product. Playing up a company largely composed and dominated by youthful stars exposes the main company's reliance on those past 40. Playing it up as futuristic wrestling is saying that the current style is soon to be outdated. Saying this group drew the largest crowd for pro wrestling on the West Coast in 22 years including two Wrestlemanias in the same building is a direct knock on the main product's lack of ability to do the same. Before it can catch on and reach its ultimate potential, it's almost doomed because of the inherent jealousy it will create. If it doesn't catch on, well, then it's doomed because it didn't work. In other words, this deal ultimately, is either doomed to creating a lot of jealousy and conflict, doomed to have a limited appeal, or simply doomed. What on the surface without thinking seems to be a win-win, is in reality after thinking, a very different situation.

AUGUST 29, 1994

The tournament to recreate a National Wrestling Alliance world heavyweight champion scheduled for 8/27 in Philadelphia at the ECW Arena seems at press time to have been given official NWA sanction.

After a week of haggling back-and-forth, it appeared the tournament would go on despite not being approved by the NWA board which hold the decision-making power for the dormant title and dormant organization. According to ECW promoter Tod Gordon, on 8/22, he had reached an agreement with Dennis Coraluzzo, who would appear at his show, which, along with Jim Crockett, would give him the two necessary votes out of the three board members to sanction the tournament to recreate the championship with the most wrestling history behind it. While Jim Crockett isn't expected at his show, earlier in the week Crockett had made it apparent that he was supporting Gordon's tournament. Coraluzzo's support apparently came from a discussion with NWA legal adviser Bob Trobich who told him that the public haggling and articles in last week's Observer and Torch made the organization look bad and they should be united in regard to the tournament. The more pragmatic idea is that since they weren't financially prepared to go to court to enforce their power over the name if they wanted to block things, Gordon was going to do the tournament anyway so they might as well go along with it.

It had appeared for most of the week that Coraluzzo and the remaining board member, Steve Rickard of New Zealand, were against Gordon holding the tournament. Rickard wanted to wait until after the NWA convention, scheduled for 9/15 in Atlantic City, before agreeing to a new champion although reportedly after the situation was reported last week, he was for creating a champion and going along with the tournament because of the feeling the publicity made the organization look bad. Coraluzzo, who has been pushing to get SMW, AAA and IWC to join to make it an internationally credible organization, was pushing for a different wrestler, Chris Benoit, to win the tournament than Gordon had picked and Crockett wanted. As of Friday, it appeared the sides had reached an impasse largely over the issue of who would win the tournament. In addition, there was a disagreement because Coraluzzo wanted promoters using the champion to have to give the champion a \$500 per appearance guarantee to give the title prestige and make sure larger groups wouldn't be able to as easily sign away the champion. He also wanted a contract giving all member promoters rights to use the champion and making sure the board was legally protected in the instance the champion refused to lose the title when requested. Reportedly there was a verbal promise made that would be put into writing this week before the tournament that the eventual winner would drop the title to Benoit, although Gordon's booker, Paul Heyman reportedly told Coraluzzo on 8/22 they'd "steal" Benoit as they had Sabu and Terry Funk, whom Coraluzzo had been using and don't work dates in the area for him anymore.

Crockett on Friday attempted to convince Coraluzzo to agree to Gordon's choice in the tournament rather than Benoit, making a scary statement that he had never even heard of Benoit, and that how could Coraluzzo know if the guy had the work ethic necessary to be champion. While Benoit is not a star in the United States and is lacking in some aspects such as facial expressions and interview ability, his work ethic is far beyond question. The idea that Crockett could claim to have never heard of him or have no knowledge of his work ethic shows at best analysis for Crockett to be a liar, which is more likely not the case. At worst, which unfortunately is the more likely alternative, that statement shows just how out of touch Crockett has become to the business and the wrestling talent of today which is scary for someone who is trying to open a new territory and compete in an exceedingly difficult business in the year 1994. We don't know at press time how that impasse was broken although imagine it will become obvious at the show.

The single elimination tournament bracketing at press time was set for a Shane Douglas vs. Tazmaniac, Dean Malenko vs. Osamu Nishimura, Benoit vs. Too Cold Scorpio and 911 vs. an as yet unnamed opponent in the first round with the winners of the first two matches and second two matches meeting in the semifinals.

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SEPTEMBER 4, 1994

In what will go down as one of the more public double-crosses in a business known for lying and double-crossing, Tod Gordon's Eastern

Championship Wrestling after holding the NWA tournament on 8/27 at the ECW Arena in Philadelphia, publicly trashed the belt and the promotion on its television show three nights later announced it was quitting the fledgling organization.

The plan to have ECW champion Shane Douglas win the tournament, then say the belt was worthless and throw it on the ground, was several weeks in the making and had a dual purpose. It was both a way to giving Douglas credibility as more than a local champion as ECW changed its name from being Eastern Championship Wrestling to Extreme Championship Wrestling and Douglas' championship of the promotion will now be called "ECW World heavyweight champion" and attempts to expand outside the Philadelphia area; and to publicly double-cross the NWA, particularly Dennis Coraluzzo and possibly Jim Crockett, and give the group the renegade promotion reputation it is building on. With the in-your-face mindset of its ECW arena core audience, when Douglas said how the NWA title had meant nothing in seven years, that the organization was dead and belt was worthless and the only belt that meant anything to him was the ECW belt, saying he would never want a championship that Ric Flair held, it got over surprisingly well. There were even chants of "Flair is dead" as Douglas made his speech. Douglas did the speech while a stunned Coraluzzo looked on. Even after the double-cross, ECW officials, Paul E. Dangerously in particular, tried to placate Coraluzzo telling him it was only an angle to get heat on Douglas, but that turned out to be just another in a string of lies when the reality was obvious on television three nights later that it was a public statement which did get over with the ECW core audience, which heavily booed Coraluzzo from the moment he came into the ring as an NWA rep.

During the week, Gordon had received approval from the NWA board by getting Coraluzzo's swing vote by promising that Douglas would lose the title to Chris Benoit, which both Coraluzzo and NWA attorney Bob Trobich were in favor of making the champion. That's just another agreement that won't be lived up to. ECW created its bracketing so that Benoit, who it appeared the NWA would make champion later in the year if the organization ever gets past being a paper organization stage, would lose in the tournament's first round to Too Cold Scorpio. Coraluzzo felt that didn't matter that Benoit lost in the first round since it he felt Benoit showed himself to be the best wrestler in the tournament, a view shared by most who called in who said the Benoit-Scorpio match (rated at \*\*\*\*1/4) stole what everyone said was an overall great wrestling show.

Douglas defeated Scorpio in the tournament finals in about 12:00 of a \*\*\*1/4 match when Scorpio missed a splash off the top rope and Douglas pinned him with a belly-to-belly. As Coraluzzo presented the new NWA title belt, Douglas started a long speech talking about the history of the title and names like Lou Thesz, Buddy Rogers and The Funks. But as the speech went on, he came to the name Flair and said how the belt was part of the past and that he didn't want to resurrect something that was dead. He said ECW was leaving the past behind and that he didn't want a belt that hasn't meant s--- in seven years.

Before going to the ring, Coraluzzo got Douglas to sign a contract as NWA champion which stipulated that he agreed to drop the title when it was requested by a majority vote of the NWA board, via either pinfall or submission. The contract stipulated a \$500 per appearance guarantee for any title defense, plus air transportation and hotel whenever he's booked more than 200 miles from his hometown (Pittsburgh in this case). The contract stipulated that any NWA promoters requesting dates on him must give him 45 days notice. If Douglas doesn't abide by the contract, as he apparently won't be doing, then the NWA can strip him of the title. There is no word on the reaction of the rest of the NWA board, although Coraluzzo himself wants to hold a tournament to crown Benoit in November.

Although both Coraluzzo and Trobich were mad, more at Gordon than Paul E. Dangerously, who no doubt masterminded most if not all of what happened, Crockett, according to those who have spoken with him since the incident, seemed unconcerned about it. Trobich, who didn't find out about what happened until 8/30, was heavily critical of Gordon saying he didn't deal with them in good faith, although said he really didn't see it as being significant because the only people he said who would know about it are the 850 fans in the building and those

who read about it in the Observer and Torch. "In wrestling you learn who you can trust and who you can't," he said. There are a lot more people on one list than the other." He said he was disappointed because in his phone conversations with Gordon he thought he was a straight-shooter and he felt they had a very cordial relationship, and Trobich went to bat for Gordon telling Coraluzzo and Steve Rickard (the other NWA board member) it was a good idea to support the tournament.

The tournament opened with Dean Malenko making Osamu Nishimura submit to the Boston Crab in a \*\*\*1/4 match; 911 then choke slammed mystery opponent Doink the Clown (Matt Osborne) four times and pinned him in less than 1:00 (1/4\*) which popped the full house of 850 since things like wrestlers dressed up as clowns are one of the reasons that audience has rejected WWF and WCW. Douglas pinned Tazmaniac (\*\*\*), and Scorpio pinned Benoit (\*\*\*\*1/4). Second round saw Douglas pin Malenko (\*\*3/4) and Scorpio beat 911 via count out (\*). In the latter, Doink came out and attacked 911's manager Paul E. Dangerously. However Doink unmasked, revealing Douglas. At this point, Osborne, who will be billed under his wrestling name Matt Borne, came out with a little bit of clown make-up on but out of the get-up and hit 911 with a chair to cause him to lose.

The only non-tournament match saw Cactus Jack & Mikey Whipreck win the ECW tag titles beating Public Enemy. Whipreck replaced Terry Funk who called earlier in the day saying he missed his flight out. Funk & Jack were scheduled to win the belts and start a three-month long program. It was announced that Funk wouldn't be there and refunds were offered at the start of the show. Jack dragged Whipreck, the perennial loser who somehow always wins, out as his partner. Rocko Rock (Ted Petty) was on the top rope ready to jump on Whipreck when a nearly KO'd Jack collapsed and hit the ropes, causing Rock to crotch himself and fall into the ring and Whipreck got the arm over his chest for the upset win (\*\*\*1/2). At press time it isn't known if Funk will be returning to ECW.

OCTOBER 17, 1994

It's been eerily quiet on the so-called Western Front leading to the latest biggest show in the history of wrestling. This one will complete the product transformation of the WCW of 1994 into the WWF of 1988, only with no chance of similar economic success. On the other end of the equation, the New Generation of American wrestling is building its next PPV show around a wrestler the same age, but hardly the same ability, as Ric Flair and an angle that took place a few weeks after the first Starrcade in a wrestling world long since gone.

It's probably the best time to take a look at the international scene and the key promotions there, and see where they are, where they've been, and hopefully, where they are going.

**ALL JAPAN PRO WRESTLING** - The most traditional promotion in the world continues on a largely successful ride, making only minor adjustments along the way. Even though American critics sometimes dismiss the success of this group as something foreign, its entire booking strategy is actually patterned after the success of an American promotion, the old Sam Muchnick St. Louis office. All Japan in many ways is the least creative promotion in the world when it comes to booking and angles. It's also turned into the greatest argument in the world that far too much emphasis is placed on being overly creative in wrestling rather than doing the simple things that when put together with the right formula draw consistent money. Like the old St. Louis office, All Japan does a patterned type of show and has a series of headliners who alternate beating one another cleanly on top, in a system where nobody seems to lose any steam by losing cleanly. If anything, All Japan has taken St. Louis one better, in that they've established a system where the guys actually gain steam by doing clean jobs. The other major differences is that while St. Louis had occasional screw-job finishes to build-up rematches (although virtually all issues were inevitably settled with 1-2-3's and then segued into the next issue) and occasional gimmick matches, All Japan eschews both completely. I can't even remember the last disqualification or count out finish on an All Japan show but you'd probably have to go back three years to find one. Do you know when the last gimmick match was on an All Japan card? That one is easier to remember because in the 23-

year history of the office, there has only been one, a 1975 Texas death match between Giant Baba and Fritz Von Erich. The promotion has four championships, but only two of which are important. The junior heavyweight title is there, but rarely important in the scheme of things. The All-Asian tag team title is something to keep a little interest up among the mid-card teams. The real titles are the singles title, known as the Triple Crown, which is considered as this group's world heavyweight title (originally derived from unifying the old United National, PWF and NWA International belts), and its world tag titles, known as the Double tag title (from unifying the old NWA International and PWF world tag belts).

As most expected, All Japan suffered only minor damage this year in popularity in the face of what could have been a catastrophic blow for many other companies, the television show being moved from an already bad 12:30 a.m. one hour Sunday night slot to a rotating 30 minute slot on Saturday nights that airs anywhere from 2 to 4 a.m. The 30 minute format generally only allows one complete match, and occasionally highlights of a second match, to air each program. Occasionally big matches from Budokan Hall, like Mitsuharu Misawa vs. Toshiaki Kawada and Steve Williams vs. Kenta Kobashi, take up two complete television shows. The television mainly hurts in regard to exposure of up-and-coming young talent and solid mid-card wrestlers, Dan Kroffat & Doug Furnas coming immediately to mind as a team always in the running for tag team of the year that probably won't get much consideration this year due to lack of television exposure. But it needs to be noted the cultural differences between the United States and both Japan and Mexico. In Japan and Mexico, with pro wrestling getting coverage in the daily newspapers, the need for television exposure isn't as great and thus television's rapidly changing ideas when it comes to pro wrestling don't have the same kind of trickle-down effect.

As business goes, the nightly business is down slightly from last year, but every show in Tokyo, including the seven or eight big shows at Budokan Hall, are still automatic sellouts. The sellout streak in Tokyo probably is around 160 shows in a row these days, a string no doubt unprecedented in the history of the pro wrestling business.

While All Japan is still considered one of the "big two" promotions in the world by Japanese fans, even though some of the smaller offices have gone through some real hot streaks, its failure to change philosophy may have had its drawbacks. The big shows at Budokan Hall, which are largely sold based on either one or two main events, just like counterpart old style St. Louis, usually sellout weeks in advance. Another approach in the face of smaller groups with main events that aren't nearly as anticipated drawing bigger crowds in stadiums would make another office try to run a blow-away show at one of the Tokyo baseball stadiums. All Japan avoids that, figuring that by running no blow-out shows, none of the Budokan shows will pale in comparison and none of the luster is taken from the golden goose, the nearly \$1 million almost guaranteed nowadays every time Budokan Hall is booked.

The strengths of this office are largely its in-ring wrestling. Kenta Kobashi and Toshiaki Kawada are probably the two top wrestlers in the world today. Mitsuharu Misawa and Steve Williams aren't far behind. Stan Hansen, Giant Baba and Dory Funk are all genuine living legend, not the self-proclaimed types that pervade many promotions' hype. Hansen is still frequently put in the spot where he's kept largely on the top level and can at any time be put on top at Budokan in a singles match and tear the house down. It has a strong group of mid-card performers, and young wrestlers, in particular Jun Akiyama and Takao Omori, are a few years away but will almost surely freshen up the top spots if things do get stale in a few years.

The major drawback is the predictability. Most cards are largely the same. Although occasional minor upsets are thrown in, the results are largely predictable, even at Budokan. Even though Kobashi sells out on top at Budokan in singles, and everyone comes to see if this is the day he finally gets the big singles win, the fact is, he always loses the big one. But as mentioned before, he gets over more doing so, which is actually one hell of a great character trait. The cards open with a few prelims that aren't much. A comedy match which is fine as long as you only see it live every few months (which is good at spot shows) but

would in other settings get old in the major cities (the lone saving grace is that seeing Giant Baba still alive and kicking, even in his limited athletic form, puts a smile on their faces as a transition from boring prelims to the hot top of the show). Mid-card matches are usually good, and the main events are generally six-man tags which are the best house show matches in the world. The weakness is that nearly every house show is the same, and compared with the previous generation, the less variety of foreigners available because this group uses its own crew of foreigners rather than having booking deals with U.S. offices to bring in new wrestlers each month makes the tours less interesting in that regard than in the past generation. Unlike the WWF and WCW in the United States, which have their ups and downs, the dead periods and hot periods, All Japan is an institution, more like major league baseball without the work stoppages. Other groups can outmarket them, other wrestlers can become mainstream celebrities, it may suffer from being too traditional at times, but it is an institution in the culture.

**NEW JAPAN** - Make no mistake about it. New Japan is the No. 1 promotion in Japan, and arguably the world (only WWF because of its greater international exposure and popularity in more countries can reasonably make a case for itself as No. 1, although there is no comparing New Japan's popularity in its home country with that of WWF in its). Ironically, to show what work rate really means, this comes during a time when its match quality is nowhere near what it had been in years past when it was the group that continually revolutionized the in-ring style of pro wrestling. New Japan has a crew of solid workers, dozens and dozens of them, almost interchangeable, many that are names, or were in the past and can be resurrected for mid-card feuds, more like AAA than any other worldwide office. But they are loaded on top with a crew of wrestlers either past their prime, or wrestlers who are solid, but still nobody in this group on top, and that includes Hiroshi Hase, is on the level of Misawa, Kobashi and Kawada when it comes to delivering at the big shows.

New Japan shines in the junior heavyweight division, with a crew that is led by the now-injured Jushin Liger, probably the best of all-time in that division, solid and underrated El Samurai, future superstar Shinjiro Otani and some great foreign regulars led by Wild Pegasus, Black Tiger and Dean Malenko. In addition, the division is augmented by wrestlers from smaller groups, in particular Michinoku Pro's Super Delfin and Great Sasuke, the latter of whom has become something of a mainstream celebrity this year. Its J-Cup tournament on 4/16 was probably the best wrestling show of the year, and its annual January 4 show at the Tokyo Dome, with both its history and gate success, ranks with WrestleMania as the biggest wrestling show of any given year.

New Japan's booking is more unpredictable than All Japan's. It also has mainly clean finishes, although on rare occasion there is either a DQ which is done so infrequently it can work in getting an angle over, or a DQ done when a wrestler (often a big-name American) isn't willing to put someone over. But its top wrestlers aren't over nor as good as those with All Japan. And just as its native heavyweights are all decent-to-good, they lack the one superstar who has it all. On the foreign side, the talent is as weak overall as it has ever been. The holes opened by the losses of Big Van Vader and Bam Bam Bigelow, who were both big and good workers in the style, have never been filled. Still, this is, from a money standpoint, the No. 1 arena promotion in the world right now. This group, even with its own time slot demotion in April, has survived better than even All Japan

Unlike All Japan, which is an isolationist group in that it doesn't deal with the outside world, New Japan has talent deals with WCW and AAA. New Japan also, unlike All Japan, has a pressing need to maintain its perception as No. 1 in the market. That's why, if UWFI continues to promote PPV shows in the U.S., I strongly expect New Japan to follow suit, probably something like bringing back the old Japan Super Show concept with WCW in 1995. In fact, there are already news reports in Japan about doing a U.S. PPV of the January 4, 1995 Tokyo Dome show with the Inoki vs. Hogan headliner (which would guarantee Inoki doing the job). While I haven't heard one word to this effect out of WCW, if the AAA show goes well, I suspect running a Japanese show would be WCW's next move and this group would seem to be more than willing to do so.

**AJW** - All Japan women is just one month away from the biggest women's wrestling show in history on 11/20 at the Tokyo Dome. It probably won't be the best, as last year's Dream Slam I will be almost impossible to top. But it will be the most publicized and will destroy all existing records for women's wrestling when it comes to attendance and gate. It will probably be one of the five largest crowds to attend pro wrestling this year. The idea that an all women's show will be able to accomplish this is amazing. But this group has already hit its peak and is well on its downslide.

That show, which will be highlighted by an eight-woman tournament of champions with champions from all four regular womens promotions (AJW--Aja Kong, LLPW--Eagle Sawai, JWP--Devil Masami and Gaea--the "worked" new promotion headed by Chigusa Nagayo), plus FMW (who is sending Combat Toyoda even though Yukie Nabeno currently holds their title since AJW didn't want to involve Nabeno in the tournament and FMW didn't want to send Megumi Kudo to do a clean job so they compromised sending Toyoda), plus EMLL's world champ, Reina Jubuki (Akira Hokuto in her retirement show working under a mask), and AJW wrestlers Manami Toyota and Yumiko Hotta. There will be mixed matches with Kaoru Ito against a shoot-boxer and Kyoko Inoue against a kick-boxer from Holland who is considered the toughest woman in the world by rep. Alundra Blayze faces Bull Nakano for the WWF womens title in what should be the title switch plus Sakie Hasegawa makes her debut as Blizzard Yuki after a new comic book character, to face Mariko Yoshida. Two more matches announced this week are Lioness Asuka, half of the famous Crush Gals team that were the big drawing cards of the mid-80s era, coming out of retirement to team with Bison Kimura, who was one of the most over women when the group gained popularity with the male audience as Aja Kong's tag partner, against Jaguar Yokota, who was the greatest female worker of her time (early 1980s) & a mystery partner, believed to be Yukari Omori. The other is Etsuko Mita & Mima Shimoda defending the JWP tag team titles against the LLPW duo of Yasha Kurenai & Michiko Nagashima, which is considered something of a letdown since Mita & Shimoda have turned into one of the best tag teams anywhere this year but the opponents in this case aren't up to their level.

The popularity of All Japan women has taken on many faces over its 26-year history. Just as American wrestling owes its beginnings to the carnival era, Japanese womens wrestling owes its beginnings to sleazy night club shows. It hit on a winning gimmick in the 1970s with the idea of using young women as a combination wrestling superstars and rock stars, largely appealing to a unique cultural phenomenon in Japan, teenage women who idolize older teenage women. This had its ups and downs. Although those who attended All Japan women during this era were not traditional wrestling fans, their intensity and passion for their idols were such that no promotion in the world could hold a candle to them for things like crowd heat and per capita merchandise sales. At the same time, they were shunned by the traditional wrestling crowd, work rate be damned since they actually had some of the best matches in Japan during this time. They were considered as a show "for teenage girls," similar to how a lot of fans shun AAA as something "for Mexicans" despite it having better wrestling matches than just about any promotion in this country.

In fact, during the mid-1980s heyday of the likes of the Crush Gals and Dump Matsumoto, when television ratings were through the roof (during this period, the weekly Saturday afternoon TV show drew ratings roughly the same as the NFL does in the United States--in the 12 to 14 range), it was in many ways dismissed by the traditional fans and thought of as something of a Japanese cult phenomenon.

It all changed around 1990, when All Japan started sending its wrestlers to appear on smaller promotion men shows and Aja Kong, Bull Nakano and Bison Kimura frequently stole the show. The old style fan has since almost been pushed out. The singing is pretty much gone. The heroine days are virtually over, as is obvious by the reaction Chigusa Nagayo, the most popular woman wrestler of all-time, gets from today's audience. It's hardcore, and in the latter stages of its most successful house show run, although it doesn't have anywhere close to the overall appeal during the mid-80s run when it was a television phenomenon.

But it's facing a problem. When it was aimed at women and the women were marketed as role models for women, thousands of women each year trained and said their prayers, for real, to get involved in the business. When thousands of applications came in each year to be trained, and they are narrowed down based on high school athletic accomplishments down to maybe 400, and they are brought to a camp and tested for speed, strength, endurance and desire, and maybe nine or ten make the grade, those nine or ten are inherently going to be the cream of the crop as athletes. When they are no longer heroines, you are drawing from a much smaller pool of applicants who want to be wrestlers, thus the athletic quality of those who pass the tests go way down. Thus the athletic level after being trained the girls achieve isn't going to be able to reach the level of the previous generation, which is a no-no in an ever-changing business that nearly has to constantly improve to survive.

Most of the current crew is past their hot period because of the frequency of injuries working 230 dates per year in such a rough, athletic and dangerous style, and because it's been the same women on top for a few years now so there are no fresh match-ups. Many of the women are on the verge of retirement, most notably Akira Hokuto, probably the best all-around woman wrestler there has ever been. The quality of those replacing them isn't there. And despite whatever records will probably be set on 11/20, you can tell the bloom is off the rose when the Korakuen Hall shows are no longer automatic overflow houses, and the line-ups don't have the oomph when reading them that they did a year ago. And like in the period after Dump Matsumoto, Chigusa Nagayo and Lioness Asuka retired, and before Aja Kong, Akira Hokuto, Kyoko Inoue and Manami Toyota got over to the new audience, there seems to be an impending dearth. Whether business will drop as bad as 1989 is unknown. Maybe it will go underground again and re-emerge to mainstream with a new base audience. But just as August 22, 1985 marked the pinnacle of the Crush Gals era; next month will mark the economic pinnacle of the new era of womens' wrestling, and with it the company will go into an inevitable decline.

All Japan women are the only Japanese promotion ever to have regular television in the United States, with a mid-1980s slot of the now-defunct Tempo cable network. There have been preliminary negotiations to get on American television, with the hopes of selling next month's show as a PPV if the product had enough exposure and showed life. But nothing close to a deal looms on the horizon, and the timing right now looks bad. At a time when U.S. television stations are cutting back on their wrestling programming, the idea of bringing in a new product, both Japanese and women's wrestling to boot, looks too fringe in what programmers believe is an industry past its peak.

**UWFI and Shoot style** - Although so-called "shoot style" wrestling has evolved from the 1984 forming of the original UWF, and peaked in the late 1980s with the popularity of Akira Maeda, this group in many ways is reminiscent of the early days of U.S. wrestling and old-style territorial promotional conflicts. There's the we're real, they're fake aura; there's the grandstand challenges; there's the using legendary wrestlers with reps for being real like Lou Thesz, Billy Robinson and Danny Hodge (which no doubt they were in the gym and could have been had they wanted to, but in reality when they were pro wrestlers, they worked their matches just like everyone else) as spokespeople, etc. Yet, look at the booking. Very simple angles based on winning and losing. In this case, there's three men, Gary Albright, Nobuhiko Takada and Super Vader who the company revolves around. They trade-off beating one another. And the results have been, on a per-show average (misleading since they only run about once a month), the best drawing company in the world. Takada and Vader split their first two meetings. Takada recently beat Albright, but then Albright returned and made Vader submit in a tag match. So who's really No. 1? That's the question the 16,500 fans who come to Budokan Hall every show ask.

But as popular as UWFI is in Japan, it seemingly failed to make its mark in the United States. Its first PPV was a moderate success, particularly introducing a new style on a show where not one performer had any real name value. But the second show didn't get anywhere near the interest of the first. A third show is upcoming, but it's doubtful it'll make any waves. The UFC seems to have cornered the market on "real" and there is little interest in UWFI. There have been attempts to gain a foothold in England, which went wild for WWF a few years ago

but the bloom is starting to come off the rose there, but thus far no major inroads have been made.

UWFI badly needs another wrestler who can be pushed to the Albright level. If they have that, and Takada can maintain his popularity, they'll be in good shape for another year. What would really hurt them is if Vader leaves, which is always a possibility considering New Japan has to know how big a hole he's left behind and they have the working deal with WCW which puts pressure on Vader to work New Japan. In addition, while Vader's money deal here is great, his bread is still buttered in WCW.

The other two shoot-style groups are Pancrase and RINGS. Pancrase has a fervent following among its hardcores as real wrestling, with its own triumvirate on top of Wayne Shamrock, Masakatsu Funaki and Minoru Suzuki. Pancrase is unique in that the matches are short, look far more real than anything else on the pro wrestling scene and its competitors are really in shape, far beyond that of any other organization. Pancrase's new wave "Hybrid Wrestling" caught fire after its first show one year ago, but now is behind UWFI when it comes to overall popularity.

RINGS is left with the remnants of the popularity of Maeda, who at one-time was "it" in the Japanese wrestling world. Although he's the top draw and focal point of the promotion, even his most ardent fans have to see Maeda is more a famous name and a reputation than an impressive competitor. But he can still sell tickets, although the days of him selling out the Tokyo Dome in three days are long over. To its credit, RINGS survived while Maeda was recovering from knee surgery, but its monthly shows seem to draw about 5,000 now. RINGS is yesterday's news trying to hang on, to the point they are now shooting pro wrestling type shoot-angles such as the recent Maeda-Dirk Vrij angle. Pancrase, which is in preliminary discussions about attempting to market itself in the United States, is trying to be tomorrow's news. Today's news is UWFI, which is kind of an amalgamation of shoot style and New Japan style with old-time booking philosophy.

**FMW** - On May 5, 1994, FMW drew a sellout 52,000 fans to Kawasaki Baseball Stadium, a city about a half-hour south of Tokyo.

FMW is the ultimate success of garbage wrestling. The work isn't very good. The native wrestlers, as compared with the big groups, don't look all that athletic or have any special moves or charisma. Well, except for Atsushi Onita.

It's been written before, but it needs to be emphasized because there is a major story in the history of pro wrestling that needs to be written on Onita and his success. At best a marginal talent with none of the ingredients one immediately thinks of when it comes to ability to draw fans, Onita developed a unique charisma that made him one of the greatest drawing cards in the history of the business. To credit the blood and the violence for the success without crediting Onita would be missing the boat. Anyone can do crazy gimmick matches. Any wrestler with a lot of guts and desire, and maybe lack of brains, can risk life and limb doing crazy stunts. But several groups following in Onita's footsteps have taken what he does--to the Extreme--to borrow a popular phrase of today, and have gone nowhere. Remember W\*ING. Dives off the balcony. Power bombs onto fire. Barbed wire baseball bats. And ultimately, extinction. For now, W\*ING is being revived as the name of the heel group in one of those fake-shoot angles vowing to finish Onita before he himself vows to retire.

But to think Onita could have done it without the blood would be even more foolish. Onita is the sympathetic babyface, taken to the extreme. Perro Aguayo times five. Dusty Rhodes times five after liposuction. The oldest tricks in the book, taken to a new level, but with someone who for whatever reason it is, has what it takes to draw fans.

Its big rival now is the remnants of the old W\*ING promotion, with a new owner called IWA. It has the bloodbaths, the gimmick matches, the monster characters, and some very good wrestlers as well. For quality of wrestling, it is a better show than FMW. It's bloodier. It's a lot wilder. But there is no Onita, which is the lone advantage FMW has.

Onita, with the 70-year-old knees at age 37, and the 1,000+ stitches in the head, arm, back and chest, has vowed to retire in May, but that would be a disaster for his company. Breaking his word would be a disaster as well.

As far as potential of the style in the United States, it's doubtful any state would allow the IWA or FMW style in. ECW is the closest thing, and has better wrestlers than either group, but hasn't taken things that extreme. Ever since the Onita vs. Terry Funk match in 1993 drew 41,000 fans and its photos appeared prominently not only in wrestling mags but in porn mags in this country, the idea of doing one of those electrified barbed wire matches on PPV has intrigued several people within wrestling. In the right situation, with the right people, if they would be allowed to do it (the biggest if of all), it would probably work as the next stage War Games gimmick runs its course. But given the current climate, it doesn't look like it would be allowed by the PPV distributors.

**EMLL** - The oldest (started in 1933 by Salvador Lutteroth, the patriarch of the family currently running the office) promotion in the world still continues to have more wrestlers on its roster and promote more live events than any wrestling company in the world.

While the promotion has declined greatly at the gate from just a few years ago and money is way down for the boys, it owns most of its own arenas and even its most severe critics admit it will always be around and be a major force.

After drawing poorly at Arena Mexico on Friday nights, the major weekly show of the promotion, for a long time, this group has made a minor comeback in recent months. But it is still nothing to brag about. From a perception standpoint, it has raided key talent, El Satanico and Zandokan most recently, right in the middle of major angles with AAA and UWA respectively, which makes it look stronger. The manner that Satanico was put over after jumping will only serve to encourage others to follow suit. Its television, both in terms of image and in quality of the matches, can't compare with AAA, but as the established group, it maintains the traditional older fan base.

Mexico is undergoing the same evolution in the wrestling business that its leaders years ago were most afraid of. Four years ago, when television was in its infancy and EMLL ruled the roost drawing 10,000 fans plus every Friday night, 6,000 every Sunday, and 3,000 most every other night, all in Mexico City alone, sometimes running as many as two-dozen house shows in the metropolitan area on a given night, it looked at its neighbors to the North and what had happened with the American house show business with disdain. In Mexico City alone they could employ 200 wrestlers, not to mention vendors, ticket takes, etc. that it takes when running as many as two dozen shows on a given night. It blamed television overexposure for breaking the backbone of the American business, an astute observation but those who made the observation weren't astute enough to avoid the pitfalls. In fact, Manny Guzman, the union head, even tried to organize a strike against having wrestling on prime time television for fear it would turn Mexico into having a U.S.-like wrestling economy. All the fears have been realized, although it's not yet at the U.S. level. The weekly listings in magazines of the big cards get smaller by the week. Wrestlers in all promotions are suffering in the pocketbook because there are less shows to work and smaller crowds at the show, and because all but two or three guys in this office work on a percentage. There are also less spots particularly for the younger and more marginal wrestlers, which is the talent development of the future. Right now Mexico has the most good young wrestlers in the world because they were getting regular work during the boom. That won't be the case in five years. While the crowds may look strong when compared with the current trends in the United States, they are not strong compared with what they were a few years ago when the EMLL's top drawing cards were legitimately working ten shows per week and the biggest stars getting over \$1,000 per shot.

Ironically, even though EMLL's television exposure in the United States is limited to airing in Los Angeles on Sunday afternoons, they have something of a presence. EMLL ran its second card in Houston on 10/2 at the Salon Aragon, drawing about 550 fans and return on 10/30 with Ultimo Dragon vs. Negro Casas. Two nights earlier then were

scheduled in Victoria, TX and canceled since virtually nobody showed up. They held a few shows at the Grand Olympic in Los Angeles earlier this year drawing 1,500 to 3,200, which were major money losers and that group is already history. Probably their biggest success was a show in Fresno, mid-sized city in Central California which drew 2,000 a few months back for Dragon vs. Casas.

**AAA** - The one group that has already made a strong mark on the U.S. scene, and has its biggest show ever a few weeks away.

It was finalized this past week for the 11/6 Los Angeles PPV show that as a second main event, it'll be double mask vs. double hair with Octagon & El Hijo del Santo vs. Eddy Guerrero & Love Machine. Making this match from a single into a tag makes this the strongest line-up AAA and IWC have presented in the United States and the biggest overall show the group has promoted since the first TripleMania in 1993. From top-to-bottom on paper, this is the strongest show on PPV in the U.S. of the year. The only problem is, aside from its own ethnic hardcore base, how can it be exposed to get first time viewers to make the buy?

The major AAA shows that are promoted hard off the Televisa network in Mexico are generally drawing well. But the number of shows per week is down. Most of the wrestlers work on a per-show guarantee, which means they have to work shows to make money. Another bloom off the rose as they haven't run in Mexico City, which should be their home base, since mid-August. The last Los Angeles show drew its smallest crowd thus far. Even Tijuana, which has become a regular spot, has gone from sellouts and turning thousands away at the door, to drawing a few hundred shy of capacity (although the gates in Tijuana are the largest ever since prices of \$13, \$10 and \$7 were raised to \$17, \$13 and \$8.50 which I believe is the price everywhere for the big house shows). The ticket prices, by American standards are exceedingly high considering an upper class family in Mexico earns maybe one-third or one-fourth of what a middle-class family in the U.S. does, so you can see why running regularly in these cities at these high prices could hurt attendance.

The problems right now with AAA in a lot of ways just as the Mexican scene seems to repeat the same evolutionary cycle as the U.S., AAA in many ways is similar to the old Jim Crockett NWA of the mid-80s. At that time Crockett was loaded with talent, just as AAA is. The difference is that AAA is the hot promotion in Mexico while Crockett was, no matter how good quality his house shows were, was always No. 2 to WWF. But from a booking standpoint, the similarities between Antonio Pena and Dusty Rhodes during his hot period are eerie. They promoted so much good wrestling and ran so many strong angles almost on a weekly basis, really too many angles so the individual angles meant less and less. Pena hasn't burned out to the degree Rhodes did, but his long-term booking has less focus. The main strong point in Pena's favor is that when it comes to the night of the show weaving a story, no booker, not Vince McMahon, Paul E. Dangerously, Giant Baba or Jim Cornette, is better. The Konnan turn was brilliantly done, but less than eight weeks later we have Blue Panther both as a face or heel depending on which side of the bed he wakes up. Fuerza Guerrera and Jerry Estrada turned on each other and nobody knows where that one is going. New feuds are constantly created with angles at a faster rate than can be used and delivered. In addition, AAA simply can't, in many ways because EMLL has the best buildings locked up, run enough dates to keep all its wrestlers happy so Pena seems to be focusing his energy on a certain core of guys rather than spreading the work around. But the guys themselves seem like the old NWA and today's WCW in that they have a pecking order and nobody seems to be moving up or down with any speed. The cards and wrestlers will eventually stagnate without movement, which will result in Pena turning another key guy, just as Rhodes did. As with Rhodes, there is so much emphasis on creative (read that screw-job) finishes to the point it almost has to hurt at some point although the crowds are still strong at this point. Unlike with Rhodes, every key wrestler does jobs when they have to thus results of the matches themselves are the least predictable of any major promotion in recent history. However, the emphasis on titles is nil, but the masks and hair mean more than title belts, so they have their foundation for drawing houses on top in masks and hair and with the exception of the Jerry Estrada-Heavy Metal match earlier this year, they deliver what they advertise as the pay-off. The only problem is, what happens when AAA's 1988 comes,

and the turns don't mean anything anymore. And then Rhodes continued to turn, and turn, and turn, and crowds went down, and down, and by the end of the year, Jim Crockett Promotions was out of business. AAA is at the same early stages of trouble that JCP was in around 1985-86 when they were still flying high and loaded up with talent, and not noticing that the seeds of company destruction were being planted. AAA has to make sure it avoids watering those seeds as Rhodes did only too well.

While the Gringo Locos are almost equivalents of the old Four Horseman, there is a hole formed by Konnan's heel turn. For what he is, Perro Aguayo is a popular legendary figure and he still works hard and knows exactly what to do to get an angle over. For a top face in the promotion, he is remarkably willing to sacrifice himself to get angles over, far more so than anyone else in his position. But he'll turn 49 in January. He can draw proud Mexicans who can relate to him as being too old, too small, too beat up, but against all odds, never giving up. But to have someone in that position as the focal babyface of the promotion has its limitations, particularly in drawing a younger audience to the matches, and also in expanding its base to a new audience in the United States. Aguayo needs another Konnan type to stand with him at the top of the American shows and nobody is there to fit the bill, although they are absolutely loaded with guys at the next level and have depth the likes of which no other promotion in the world comes close to. It looks like they may turn Cien Caras face, but he'd just be another Perro Aguayo. In addition, on the Gringo Locos side, they probably could use a strong working heel, since Eddy Guerrero, Black Cat and Love Machine all have Japanese commitments that will only get stronger in 1995 and Chicano Power and Ice Killer as subs in the spot don't cut it either.

As far as the American market goes, to say this PPV is of major historical importance may be an understatement. With the exception of Bash at the Beach, this is the most important PPV show in the U.S. this year. IWC is on the verge of going one way or another and after this show, depending upon how well the show comes off, and how many buy it, the group will either have solidified itself as a major promotion or be shunned by the mainstream as a third-rate, third-world thing only for Mexicans. If it's successful, AAA and IWC will be established as the unquestioned No. 3 promotion (in terms of interest level, certainly a lot higher than that in terms of arena business and bottom line profit) in the American market, even though it really already is, and will probably run two or three more PPV shows in 1995. Its top wrestlers that are largely unknowns to in this country outside the ethnic community may start to get their due.

If it isn't, despite the strong houses drawn thus far, it could be a crippling blow, because there are financial risks in running such a major show and this is not a vanity company run by those who are either fans themselves or don't know anything other than wrestling, and will keep it alive until they go broke. And despite all the enthusiasm running around, particularly since the double hair vs. double mask match was etched in stone, and all the skeptics on the other side saying it won't sell anything, the fact is not only does nobody know how well it will do. Nobody even has a clue. This is uncharted waters.

The show being presented on paper couldn't be stronger. The idea that Mexicans are too poor to purchase PPV events was blown out the window by Julio Caesar Chavez being the biggest drawing card on PPV last year. But it may be one year too early to take the risk, because if the group had regular weekly television on Univision stations (which reach tons more homes than Galavision) in the U.S. for one year getting the storylines over, or even some English-language television to expose it to a new audience, it would greatly increase the chances of success.

Ultimately IWC has the plan of expanding the audience base to traditional wrestling fans, a market it has yet to draw from, starting with this PPV show. Can it maintain its core ethnic audience while also trying to take measures to make it more "American-friendly?" And how can this be done if it even can be done? And despite denials from many concerned, this is the wrestling business, a business built on jealousy and back-stabbing. If the show is successful, it will threaten people who will try and cut it off. And if it isn't successful, then none of that matters.



Almost immediately after the PPV, from 11/16 to 11/21, this group will also become the second foreign promotion to tour Japan (WWF being the first with a few major shows at the Tokyo Dome and the four-city tour earlier this year). Victor Mar (Black Cat), who works for AAA and also works in the office for New Japan, put the somewhat low-key first tour of five cities in Southern Japan (11/16 in Yashio; 11/17 in Sasebo; 11/18 in Hiroshima which will be the biggest show; 11/19 in Yamaguchi and 11/21 in Hakata) together. They'll come nowhere near Tokyo on the tour which is surprising since that's the base of the hardcore audience. The tour will have from AAA, Perro Aguayo, Konnan El Barbaro, Mascara Sagrada, El Mexicano, El Hijo del Santo, Blue Panther, La Parka, Psicosis, Black Cat, Love Machine and Black Tiger (Eddy Guerrero using his New Japan gimmick) plus midgets Mascarita Sagrada, Octagoncito, Espectrito and Jerrito Estrada. Also on the tour will be Wild Pegasus, Great Sasuke, Gran Hamada, IWGP junior heavyweight champ Norio Honaga, Akira Nogami, Takayuki Iizuka, Hiro Saito, Tadao Yasuda, El Samurai, Satoshi Kojima and Shinjiro Otani.

NOVEMBER 7, 1994

To say the 11/6 PPV from the Los Angeles Sports Arena is a do-or-die show for either AAA or Mexican-style wrestling in the United States is probably both inaccurate and an overstatement. But it is, by far, the most important show of its type ever in the United States. Ever since El Hijo del Santo established himself as a major drawing card in Southern California back in 1987 when his hair vs. mask match with Negro Casas at the Olympic Auditorium in Los Angeles outdrew what both the NWA (which at the time ran regularly at the Forum) and WWF (which at the time ran at the Sports Arena) were drawing, the popularity of Mexican-style wrestling in Southern California has been a largely ignored phenomenon. The roots of this interest go back even farther as probably the biggest drawing card in the city in the prior wrestling era (with the possible exception of Fred Blassie) was Mil Mascaras (Aaron Rodriguez), a former bodybuilding champion who at the time the hottest young superstar babyface in Mexico.

The Southern California NWA promotion regularly featured the superstars from Mexico in the 1970s. At the time the cultural barriers when it came to wrestling between the United States and Mexico weren't nearly as great as they are today. The top stars from Mexico regularly worked for the LeBelle promotion in Southern California, for Paul Boesch in Houston and a few ventured up North to work for Roy Shire. In South Texas, the history of using the top stars from Mexico goes back even farther than California as names like Rito Romero, Miguel "Blackie" Guzman and the original Atomic Pair (El Santo & Salvador "Gory" Guerrero) were the top drawing babyfaces in the 40s and 50s for promoter Morris Siegel.

On several occasions in the early 70s when Mascaras was brought in to headline, shows at the Olympic Auditorium sold out so quickly that they were broadcast live to thousands of others at large downtown movie theaters, the actual first wrestling cards ever shown via closed-circuit, the predecessor to today's PPV. In fairness, it wasn't just Mascaras as the promotion was hot during the time period and it wasn't a one-man show, and the biggest drawing feud was Fred Blassie vs. John Tolos, but Mascaras was the biggest individual drawing card during that time.

Mascaras' popularity was hardly limited to a Spanish speaking audience as evidenced by his being, along with Bruno Sammartino, Dusty Rhodes and Andre the Giant, on more English magazine covers than any other wrestler of era. When Eddie Einhorn, the Chicago White Sox owner, tried in the mid-70s to run a national wrestling promotion head-to-head with the WWWF and NWA offices in their respective territories, a high-priced failure, the decision was made to go with Mascaras as the group's world champion and top drawing card.

By the late 70s, wrestling on the West Coast went largely down the tubes, except for the occasional Mascaras comeback which drew fewer and fewer each time it was tried. While the oldest of Gory Guerrero's sons, the acrobatic Chavo Guerrero, was pushed as the top draw and achieved a measure of national fame through being the top star on SIN, outside of California, Japan and Texas he never came close to Mascaras-level popularity, because most promoters in that era

felt that at his size (Chavo was 5-8, 205), he was unpushable on top. Guerrero's best-known rival at the time was a young wrestler getting his first career break, Roddy Piper. When they were drawing surprisingly consistent good houses, everyone in wrestling at the time thought it was Guerrero who was the hot new attraction. In the late 70s, superstars from Mexico like Cien Caras, Los Brazos, Dos Caras, Canek, Gran Hamada, Perro Aguayo, Los Missionarios de la Muerte (El Signo & El Texano & Negro Navarro), Los Gemelos Diablos (Twin Devils) and even a horribly washed-up Chino Chou were brought in as headliners, but the territory was too far gone. Ironically, what put Los Angeles back on the wrestling map in the 80s was eliminating the smaller wrestlers and the entire Mexican influence which by this time had turned off all but the hardest of hardcores, with the WWF land-of-the-giants product which did excellent business from the mid-80s and has held up better than most markets even to this day.

The success of the 1987 Santo era was short-lived. The local promoters made the same mistakes they continuously have, trying to use cheaper local wrestlers, particularly past-their-prime Americans, but also locals of Mexican heritage as opposed to current superstars in Mexico, as headliners. Shows and promotions came and went on a regular basis, some drawing very well for short periods of time but none lasting. It wasn't until 1992, when shows were successful enough to warrant anyone outside the local community to take notice again.

During the spring and summer of that year, a promotion running at the 6,500-seat Cal State-Los Angeles Gym ran regular shows, starting with a sellout crowd for a show that combined EMLL, by then popular on local television, and Japanese FMW talent, with the trio of Atsushi Onita & Tarzan Goto & Santo as the headlining babyfaces. The promotion was then built around a former local indie wrestler from San Diego, Konnan El Barbaro. Konnan had gone to EMLL just as televised matches were being introduced in Mexico. Through hitting it big at the right time, he, Octagon and Vampiro Canadiense became the first of the new generation of Mexican wrestlers to become genuine crossover celebrities the level of which only Hulk Hogan has achieved in our culture. Crowds continued strong in Los Angeles with Konnan on top, although not sellouts. The peak of this promotion came just after EMLL booker Antonio Pena left the group, and with the backing of Televisa, the largest television network in Mexico, formed AAA to provide the network with highly-rated prime time telecasts of the major wrestling superstars. Televisa's money brought four of EMLL's top drawing cards at the time (Konnan, Aguayo, Santo and Octagon) with Pena. AAA held a television taping on July 4, 1992 in Los Angeles, drawing another sellout of 6,500 fans, turning away 2,500 more at the door, and doing a \$120,000 house, shattering all shorts of American records for foreign-based shows. This shocked the normally closed-minded American wrestling industry to take notice of the long-forgotten Mexican wrestling once again because it came during a summer when American wrestling was largely hitting the skids in the wake of steroid and sex scandals along with poor booking. But the success was brief and it was quickly forgotten. That was the last AAA show in the United States for another year as Pena and the local promoters had a falling out over money from the record house. The locals continued to promote regularly at the CSLA Gym, using EMLL wrestlers, most notably Vampiro and Atlantis as the big draws, and drew a few more crowds in the 3,000 to 4,000 range before the promotion bottomed out and went out of business after a few crowds of less than 300.

In early 1993, Ron Skoler, an entertainment attorney and an associate of wrestling talk show host John Arezzi, approached business associates in the music field about promoting Mexican wrestling in cities with large Mexican populations in the United States. Eventually they made the connection with both Konnan, who by this time had become the biggest drawing card in Mexico. AAA, in its first year in operation, exploded onto the Mexican scene and within a few months was the hottest promotion in the world. AAA sold out the 10,600-seat Juan de la Barrera Gym in Mexico City on 13 of 15 straight Friday nights in early 1993 using the likes of Konnan, Aguayo, Santo and Octagon and Los Hermanos Dinamita on top and focusing the undercard on hot younger wrestlers getting their first national push (Rey Misterio Jr., Winners, Super Calo, Heavy Metal, La Parka and Psicosis) who tore down the house weekly. It climaxed on April 30, 1993 with a sellout crowd of 48,000 at the Plaza de Toros for the Konnan vs. Cien Caras retirement match which saw Jake Roberts' distraction "cost Konnan his career." AAA has had its ups and downs

since that point, although on a consistent basis has remained the best drawing promotion in the world, but it never regained the popularity of the early 1993 Juan de la Barrera run.

Skoler and Pena put together "La Revancha," Konnan's revenge, on August 28, 1983 at the Los Angeles Sports Arena, the same building Vince McMahon failed to sellout for two different Wrestlemanias. The triangular match with Konnan, Roberts and Caras sold out 16,742 tickets (although many more snuck into the building and there were approximately 18,000, nearly 2,000 more than capacity, inside). Another 8,000 were turned away at the door. It was the largest crowd to witness pro wrestling west of the Rockies in 22 years. If it had been held at a larger venue, it would have been the largest crowd of all-time on the West Coast. Since that time, Skoler promoted three more shows in Los Angeles with gates ranging from \$238,000 for the Konnan-Roberts cage match this past March down to \$145,000 for the most recent show in August. AAA during the same time period has ventured successfully into San Jose, Chicago and Laredo, somewhat successfully into New York and San Diego, and unsuccessfully into Vancouver, WA, Yakima, WA, Las Vegas and Oakland, all but Yakima in cities in which even attempting was a major miscalculation due to the group having no TV exposure whatsoever in the other cities.

Despite all these huge houses and a lot of acclaim for the house shows, this has done virtually no crossover business, the knock many have noted as an excuse to either downplay or ignore the success. Nor is it possible that it ever will without English language television. The old Spanish International Network Wednesday night Los Angeles shows, which did have crossover appeal not only in Southern California but also in New York, South Texas, South Florida and Northern California, even though they were primarily in Spanish, did contain English ring announcing, many English language interviews and promos, which, along with it featuring several non-Hispanics on top and not having the constricting label of being promoted as "Mexican wrestling," made it viewer-friendly enough to those speaking English that they'd put up with the Spanish play-by-play and interviews to see the faster action.

On 11/6, AAA and IWC are doing a PPV show, both in English and in Spanish, largely financed by WCW, which after the first Los Angeles success, smartly looked at jumping on a positive financial bandwagon.

However, the inherent problems of WCW being a part of this equation, which have been gone into, have resulted as expected, almost too predictably, like clockwork. After putting up the money to finance the PPV, WCW totally dropped the ball on promoting the event on its television. Initially the plan was to bring the top stars of the PPV to Atlanta to shoot matches, angles and interviews leading to the show. It was decided that money could be saved if, instead, they simply aired footage from Mexico on TBS with the major angles and matches to get the wrestlers over. AAA, notorious for doing business at slower-than-a-snails pace, was late with the tapes. WCW then decided the tapes weren't of broadcast quality, although that decision was made with more than enough time remaining to still bring the wrestlers to Atlanta for a taping and do it right, although by this point it would have been a rush job. But by this time, WCW was in upheaval because it had to justify its own salary structure and expenses and made the decision to do the ultimate hotshot angle for Flair vs. Hogan career vs. career, and didn't want anything to interfere with the promotion of that event. While there are people in the WCW office that are behind the event and it doesn't appear anyone outright tried to sabotage the event, to excuse what happened by saying the ball was simply dropped when it came to promoting the event would also be unfair as situations the past few weeks have shown. Aside from doing very little, well actually nothing except saying Konnan and Perro Aguayo were once friends and are now enemies, to get the event over after the Havoc PPV was over in regard to getting the characters and storylines across, Eric Bischoff, after approving of spending of several hundred thousand dollars to put this show together, changed course and didn't want to get anything to get over on his television. The promotion wound up limited to Chris Cruise events centers, which, while well done, probably left the vast majority of viewers thinking to themselves, "Who are these people he's talking about?" Those alone are hardly enough to sell a new concept PPV, especially during a 30-day period where PPV is in the state of wrestling overload. The piece of the puzzle that threw all the excuses out the window were several English interviews cut by Konnan and

Love Machine, the former of which shocked everyone who saw them because they were stronger and more fired-up interviews than anyone currently in WCW was capable of. The decision was made not to air any of those interviews. It would be understandable for WCW not to want to help get over what ultimately could be a very competitive group and get its stars over to a new audience, particularly a group that is a generation ahead of them when it comes to developing new stars, workrate style and putting on house shows. It would even be understandable for WCW to be willing to help out this show as far as connections go, but do little to promote the event since it has its own product and this show falls right between two major WCW shows. But my god, it was WCW that chose the date to begin with. What is totally baffling is it was WCW that came up with the idea for the PPV, WCW that decided upon the date (which is clearly six months to one year too early because the product and those involved in marketing the product simply weren't ready for such an undertaking), and WCW which is putting up the money thus actually stands to lose the most if the thing flops on PPV. Yet, after making a sizeable investment in the show including purchasing some very expensive national television ads on Univision, it was WCW that did almost everything in its power to make sure it didn't get over, except to its already established base audience. Even though the event flopped miserably, think back to how WWF promoted its WWF PPV. They spent months getting over the personalities and hit the event hard on its television and bought a one hour television show for months on cable to further expose the personalities, get over the new concept and ultimately push the event. As it turned out, the event was unpushable and failed, but nobody can fault WWF for holding back promoting it for fear it or some of the personalities might get over on their television or because there were wrestling feuds they had to promote as the same time.

Admittedly, whatever audience WCW would have been able to garner if they had done just the basic textbook job of promoting the event would have been an exceedingly difficult sell with no English language base audience and so little time to get it over. It may not have done any better with a new audience unfamiliar with it than the WWF PPV did. It isn't easy to sell wrestling in any form today, let alone a new concept from scratch and new names to an audience that has no clue and no gut feeling for anything related to the product. Even in a best-case scenario, any English language buys would and should only be only icing on the cake. But AAA, besides providing an awesome line-up, has done little promotional work itself. During the body of its national television show there have been very few references to the show and nothing about it being the first AAA show on PPV. The belief from Mexico is that since the same show broadcast in U.S. airs on prime time in Mexico with umpteen times more viewership, they don't want to overly hype a show that their prime audience can't see. This show needed to be hyped on Galavisión as hard as TripleMania I was, and it hasn't been close. Really, for AAA to do a PPV, it needs to be made available both in Mexico and the United States, but Mexican PPV companies, which are in their infancy, aren't interested in carrying wrestling after WWF Wrestlemanias in the past died, and turned down this event. But the show can no longer be successful if English language buys are just the icing. Somehow the lines of communication within the cable industry were also fouled up and many systems are only carrying it in English, with WCW's Chris Cruise and Mike Tenay handling the broadcast, who will probably wind up being the single most prepared duo ever to work a PPV show. Arturo Rivera and Dr. Alfonso Morales are doing the Spanish feed, which is being carried by several systems that will carry it on a separate station. But it appears most systems are only carrying it in English and the barker channel advertising WCW was counting on to bring in the Spanish buys has only been in English, even though the promotion and advertising of the show has been almost exclusively earmarked for a Spanish speaking audience.

If the PPV does well, the relationship is of economic benefit to both sides. But ultimately, win or lose on the first show, and forgetting that many of the mistakes were due to this being a learning experience rather than sabotage, this is a doomed partnership. Any arguments that it isn't went out the window when the Konnan interviews didn't air on TBS. WCW would be comfortable with AAA as cute third-world and second-rate wrestling, limiting its potential appeal with the restrictive push on-air as "Mexican wrestling." Although many tried to argue differently, the Mexican connotation, which was beneficial only in marketing the shows to Mexicans because of nationalist pride, is a turnoff when used in the English language. Before one wrestling fan

made a decision about the show, many cable distributors made the decisions negative for them beforehand based specifically on the word Mexican. They didn't think their audience would be interested in something Mexican, probably correctly, and it cost the group several million homes in the PPV universe in the United States and all of Canada.

Many have already written the PPV off as death, the big tree falling in the empty forest, does it make any noise? It may be the best PPV of the year. It will almost surely have the most heat, the most spectacular wrestling and from top-to-bottom, only Spring Stampede should rival it for match quality. But if nobody sees it, does it really matter? But this product has surprised a lot of people over the past 14 months. My skepticism about its chances in the United States ended first hand on August 27, 1993. I can vividly remember with television promos and local promotion almost non-existent and no history of success in the market, walking into the San Jose State Gym expecting to see 500 to 700 largely confused and curious people, and instead seeing 4,600 rapid fans setting the city's all-time record gate, who knew the storylines better than any fans at any show I'd seen in a long time.

Those dismissing this promotion as having no chance to make it in the United States have their heads buried in the sand and need to come out for air and a reality check. That question has already been answered. In 1994, this group will gross more American dollars spent in this country at the gate than ECW, SMW or USWA. If the show actually beats the odds and does PPV business, it could very possibly on six U.S. shows outgross all three aforementioned promotions combined for the year. It will average on a per-show basis more than any American promotion probably ever has in history. Because of limited exposure and running basically very few shows, it is nowhere close to WWF or even WCW when it comes to popularity and is really miles behind either. But it is a solid No. 3 already; No. 2 as far as house shows go. Is there is crossover potential beyond the Mexican-American market? That's the unproven question. There may be, although there isn't at all yet, but this or future PPVs, if they become a regular feature, won't make a dent in it. It has more potential than any new form of wrestling in this country because it comes in with a loyal established base, something no other form can boast of. But crossover appeal can only come from having English language television with decent penetration and smart marketing, something that at this point isn't even close to happening.

As for the live show, the line-up is strong enough that it "should" sellout, but there are outside factors that make 10-15,000 more realistic. Ch. 22, the local station that carries AAA only ran one commercial (which aired during the EMLL show) on 10/16, none on 10/23 before being loaded with commercials on 10/30--so virtually the entire television push was on the show one week before the show. Running Sunday at 4:30 p.m. in Los Angeles is a difficult time to draw fans to an arena event although that may not be the case because Sunday late afternoon is known as Mexican family time, although thus far IWC shows on Sunday afternoons haven't drawn as well as Friday and Saturday nights. They probably should have advertised a 4 p.m. start because this is such a late arriving crowd and the show will go on promptly at 5 p.m. when people will still be arriving. The dark match will be Shinobi (Al Snow under a hood) vs. Psicopata (Mando Guerrero under a hood). In addition, the live show goes head-to-head with the three hour television show on Ch. 22 which airs main event matches with most of the same wrestlers for free. In addition, although the quality of the first three AAA shows in Los Angeles was nothing short of spectacular, the last show was well below the standard of previous events. In addition, television hype for the double hair vs. double mask match, which is the match that really should have sold out the building, has been subpar because Eddy Guerrero spent most of the key hype period in Japan and thus there really haven't been strong angles leading to the match. The advance for the show was about 2,000 at press time. The advance at press time before the first sellout was 3,000, but this is well ahead of what it was for the last show, and this will always be a walk-up crowd.

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Off of business and onto the product. Besides the basic differences everyone knows about, smaller guys, lots of masks, more flying

moves, six-man tags, two of three falls, needing to pin two wrestlers or the captain to score the fall, finishes revolving around low blows too often, overly choreographed triple simultaneous pin finishes, there are other less inherent differences first-time viewers should note.

AAA is not traditional Mexican wrestling. That's EMLL, and even they are changing. AAA is dominated by the Mexican influence, but has a strong American influence because of several of the wrestlers working on top, and a Japanese influence because so many of the younger wrestlers that dominate the new breed are students of the Japanese wrestlers.

The difference is that American wrestling has evolved into primarily television product and promotion is based largely around television. The wrestlers work the cameras and the style is based and has evolved a lot from what works within the confines of the small screen. Mexican style is still mainly based on what works at the arenas with virtually no television influence except in a primitive manner. The other major difference is the manner bumps are taken. Because Mexican rings traditionally are as hard as granite (although that also has changed in recent years), wrestlers take bumps and sell differently. To an American fans' eye, that is the key in things looking sloppy or fake when it is just how Mexicans sell. Mexican fans think American style looks sloppy, slow and fake because of the same differences. For reasons I don't know other than evolution, the punches in Mexico are generally a lot stiffer, but often don't look as good to a novice American viewer because of the way the bumps are taken off the punches. The chops usually aren't as stiff as in the U.S., although that is changing because of the American influence in AAA. Clotheslines and some of the kicks are weaker and not as well-timed. The brawling is wilder and bloodier because it's developed toward playing to the live crowd rather than fitting action into the confines of a TV screen. The flying is more creative and extensive because generally these are much smaller men. Power moves are limited for the same reason.

This is a generalization that is sure to get much of the U.S. wrestling industry hot, but to make any other conclusion would require me to also bury my head in the sand and pretend I haven't seen what I have live regularly over the past year plus. Because of how the product has evolved and the lack of television influence until recent years and also because of the strong motivational factors of its wrestlers and a lack of older wrestlers jealously trying to limit or even eliminate progress or changes, AAA from a strictly style standpoint is a much stronger product than its American counterparts. Matches not only are far more athletic generally, but they are far superior when it comes to crowd psychology and telling a story. It is a more exciting live product and has evolved a generation ahead of our product when it comes to techniques of drawing heat and innovative moves. Of course Ric Flair has more ring psychology than Winners and Shawn Michaels blows away Konnan or Perro Aguayo for creative moves but it is a valid generalization.

Unlike the American product, the matches almost never hold up as well on television because at best television can only capture 60 to 75% of what's going on in the six-man tags. Even in singles matches where missed shots will be at a minimum, wrestles are still much better at playing to the audience than to the cameras. The usage of television to prop up the product is terribly primitive to the point crowd noise is almost never captured well. There is so much going on for the live crowd all over ringside and they don't slow down the product and keep the action in one part of the ring to make for a better television product. It can get frustrating hearing large pops on television when the camera totally misses the move, like a WCW PPV show but magnified many times over. Unless there is a major surprise, my belief is one of the biggest complaints about the show will be that the cameras either miss or shoot from poor angles 25 to 40%, maybe even more, of the spectacular moves. Even if they were to miss 60%, there will still be more spectacular wrestling on this show than any other PPV this year. The other major complaint will probably be too many screw-job finishes.

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For those viewing the product this weekend for the first time, here are a few things to look out for in the various matches:

(1) Mascarita Sagrada & Octagoncito (faces) vs. Jerrito Estrada & Espectrito: This is a minis match, the Mexican version of midget wrestling that was a U.S. mainstay an era back. These are the four best minis as far as work goes of all-time. The face duo are both about three-and-a-half feet tall. Estrada, on the other hand, is five-feet-tall and towers over the faces, giving the visual impression of a ridiculous mismatch. Espectrito is the best worker of the four. The psychology behind the match is that the face minis are geared toward young children ages eight and under, who see them as representing them in their most basic conflicts, with the older kids. Espectrito is the fat kid several years older who picks on them. Estrada is the teenager that makes fun of them and picks on them. Hardcore fans accept them because the workrate is awesome. While there is comedy involved, this isn't the midget matches long-time fans are used to. Espectrito is actually the best worker of the four, but usually it's Sagrada who gets over the best. Espectrito and Sagrada are particularly over in Los Angeles because of their singles matches the past two shows, the March match which would have been the best minis match ever. Sagrada is the mini who jumped off the cage on Jake Roberts. Actually the less-publicized Octagoncito is the more solid worker on the face team but Sagrada is the one with the charisma and the more spectacular moves.

(2) Rey Misterio Jr. & Heavy Metal & Latin Lover (faces) vs. Madonna's Boyfriend & Fuerza Guerrera & Psicosis: Misterio Jr., originally from San Diego, is both the youngest and smallest (except for minis) superstar in the biz at 19-years old and being 5-2, 145. He's the heart and soul of the AAA product, an undersized incredibly gutsy flier with the most creative flying moves in the world with the exception of Great Sasuke. Heavy (Eric Casas), has the rock star looks and is the younger brother of Negro Casas, considered the all-time greatest worker ever to come out of Mexico. He and Misterio Jr. are by far the most popular of the undercard wrestlers in Los Angeles. Heavy, 24, has physical ability to be Mexico's version of Shawn Michaels but is an inconsistent performer. Latin Lover at about 6-1, 235 is a rare heavyweight doing a stripper gimmick which is okay underneath but limits him as a main eventer because fans don't think of dancers as tough enough to headline the shows. He resembles a younger Bret Hart as far as looks go. As a worker, he was terrible when he arrived in AAA one year ago but has improved a lot and is now okay. Madonna's Boyfriend is Southern California indie wrestler Louie Spicolli, who just started with AAA in Mexico and is getting a sizeable push filling Eddy Guerrero's spot since Guerrero has so many Japanese commitments over the next few months to fill Jushin Liger's spot. Psicosis, from Tijuana, is the Jushin Liger of Mexico, right down to the ring costume. He started out of the same training class as Konnan and Rey Misterio Jr., is one incredible bump-taker and probably one of the two or three best all-around performers in the Western world. Expect spots out of this world when he's in with Misterio. Guerrero, 40, is a veteran worker who specializes in making his foes look better than they really are.

(3) Tito Santana & Too Cold Scorpio & Pegasus Kid (faces) vs. Blue Panther & La Parka & Jerry "El Puma" Estrada: Everyone is familiar with the faces. Scorpio and Pegasus have extensive experience working in Mexico while Santana doesn't. Panther, 34, is the current Mexican middleweight champ, a belt he's held on-and-off for nearly two years. He's about 5-5, 190, a short powerfully built classic mat wrestler, but strong on flying spots as well. Crowd reaction will be interesting here. Panther will get a huge face pop coming out. It'll be interesting how the crowd takes three wrestlers they largely don't know who are foreigners against three heels that they do know and in the case of Panther and Parka, they really like down deep. Parka wears a skeleton costume so initially it'll be hard to take him as a serious worker. Big mistake. But that emotion should end after the first high spot. Parka is a spectacular bump taker in the mold of a larger version of Psicosis. Estrada, 36, is the burned out veteran with uncanny comedic timing and psychology, who still takes probably the best bumps over the top rope of anyone in wrestling. The talent is here for a spectacular match, but with the exception of Pegasus and Panther who worked against each other many years ago in UWA, none of the faces and heels have ever worked against each other before. If there is a chance it won't be

great, it's limited to not being able to overcome that obstacle. But when was the last time anyone saw Pegasus in a match that wasn't good?

(4) Santo & Octagon (faces) vs. Love Machine & Eddy Guerrero: The show stealer. This will be 2/3 falls (underneath matches are all one fall due to time constraints) double mask vs. double hair and should garner incredible heat. Santo is exceedingly well-loved, based on the heritage from his father and the fact he is a great worker, although he doesn't get the charismatic big pops just by coming out the curtain that others would. Best comparison of his popularity would be Giant Baba in Japan, where he's ore a cultural dignitary than a hot wrestler. Octagon is a star created by television and a kids hero. Charismatic. Not as good a worker as the other three, but good enough that he isn't going to hurt the match. A lawyer by trade, he's the biggest merchandise seller in Mexico. Machine & Guerrero are probably the best tag team in the world right now. This is their chance to prove it.

(5) Perro Aguayo (face) vs. Konnan El Barbaro: These are the two biggest draws in Mexico right now battling in a cage match. Aguayo, who turns 49 in January, is an "everyman" type hero. His gimmick is he's the proud old Mexican who gets beaten up because his opponents are bigger, stronger, younger and faster, but he never gives up. Even when he loses, he keeps fighting until they have to drag him away. With Konnan turning, Aguayo has had to carry more of the face load for this company. His enthusiasm and charisma are his strongpoint, although he's a good brawler with very good psychology. He's not going to surprise anyone with athletic moves. But at his age, carrying the load has its price and the company badly needs someone who can help him because at the last TV he really looked tired and beaten up. Konnan's strength is his intensity and fire in the ring combined with charisma. He's atypical for a Mexican wrestling star at about 240-250, and looking even larger because he's juiced up and because everyone else is so much smaller. His work is better as a heel and the heat was incredible at the last show whenever he and Aguayo went at it, but even so, he's hardly a great worker. Los Hermanos Dinamita will be at ringside for this match, so this may turn out to be more of an elongated wrestling angle rather than a classic main event match.

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NOVEMBER 14, 1994

The biggest women's wrestling extravaganza in history, the eight-hour marathon with 22 matches at the Tokyo Dome on 11/20 was pretty much officially announced in its entirety this past week. Word we get is they expect a crowd in excess of 30,000 fans, which would be a gate in the range of \$3 million because of the high scale ticket prices, since the show has been so well hyped for so long and features the Japanese retirement of Akira Hokuto, who is largely respected as the greatest female all-around worker in history. Line-up has: 1) Chapparita Asari (AJW) & Bomber Chime (Gaea Promotions) vs. Hiroumi Yagi & Hiroumi Sugo (JWP team); 2) Midget tag team match; 3) Candy Okutsu (JWP) defends the Japanese junior heavyweight title vs. Rie Tamada (AJW) in a match that is also the finals of the interpromotional Japanese jr. tournament; 4) Suzuka Minami (AJW) vs. Kaoru (Kaoru Maeda, Gaea Promotions); 5) In a five-round kick boxing match, AJW's Kumiko Maekawa vs. Suyoa Miyusa (female kick boxer); 6) Doris Brinbeau (amateur wrestler from France) vs. Kyoko Hamaguchi (Japanese national amateur wrestling champion, daughter of pro wrestler Animal Hamaguchi, making her pro debut); 7) Mika Yamamoto vs. Ana Gomez; 8) Kaoru Ito (AJW) vs. Miko Ishimoto (woman shoot boxer--Japanese sport where the combatants fight with gloves but wrestling moves are allowed as well as boxing); 9) Chigusa Nagayo (Gaea) vs. Reggie Bennett (AJW); 10) Toshiyo Yamada & Tomoko Watanabe (AJW) vs. Shinobu Kandori & Mikiko Futagami (LLPW); 11) UWA (Mexican promotion) tag team title with Etsuko Mita & Mima Shimoda (AJW) vs. Yasha Kurenai & Michiko Nagashima (LLPW); 12) Legends match with Jaguar Yokota & Bison Kimura vs. Lioness Asuka & Yumi Ogura; 13) Blizzard Yuki (AJW's Sakie Hasegawa debuting a new gimmick based on a popular TV animated and cartoon character in a cross-marketing deal) vs. Mariko Yoshida (AJW); 14) First round of the "Best in the World" tournament--Yumiko Hotta (AJW) vs. Combat Toyoda (FMW); 15) Tournament continues with Akira Hokuto (AJW) vs. Eagle Sawai (LLPW); 16) Tournament continues with Aja Kong (AJW) vs. Manami Toyota (AJW); 17) Takako

Inoue (AJW) & Cutie Suzuki (JWP) vs. Megumi Kudo (FMW) & Hikari Fukuoka (JWP); 18 & 19) Best in the world semifinals; 20) Alundra Blayze defends WWF womens title against Bull Nakano; 21) A martial arts match with Kyoko Inoue. It was announced her opponent would be Lucia Rijker (not sure of spelling), the Dutch woman reputed to be the toughest woman on Earth, although we have since received reports that match may have fallen apart; 22) Finals of the tournament.

A monkey wrench may have been thrown into the tournament. JWP's Dynamite Kansai, who if my predictions on how it would go, would face Hokuto in the finals, was injured on 11/6 at Tokyo Korakuen Hall as was said to be questionable for the tournament. Kansai was in a tag match and Fukuoka debuted a moonsault foot stomp (moonsault off the top rope landing with both feet on Kansai's stomach) and didn't hit right and injured Kansai's ribs.

Because we'll be in Japan for extensive coverage of the Dome show, there will be no 11/28 Observer. Next week's issue will go out on time, and we'll come back with one issue immediately after Thanksgiving that will cover the 11/16 Clash, the 11/18 AAA New Japan TV taping show in Hiroshima Green Dome, the 11/20 Dome and the 11/23 Survivor Series with probably no other news which would be the fourth issue of the current set. We'll try and immediately get back on schedule three days later with the first issue of the next set to cover all the news from the interim period including 11/19 ECW show and 11/19 NWA tournament and what is almost sure to be a ton of news from that time period.

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The biggest show put on by a foreign-based promotion ever in the United States took place 11/6 at the Los Angeles Sports Arena, "When Worlds Collide," the AAA/IWC WCW-produced PPV event. No buy rate figures will be available until the end of the week, but due to botched up television promotion of the PPV, the buy rate isn't expected to be anything special.

The show officially drew 12,024 paid (about 13,000 total in the building set up for 16,000) and \$202,465. Of the five Los Angeles AAA/IWC house shows over the past 15 months, this was the third biggest crowd and gate and also the third best show. Ironically, of the five shows, both the gate and quality of the shows rated one through five would be in the same order, with the debut show as the best show they've run, followed by March '94, this show, the November '93 and bringing up the rear both in show quality and gate was the August '94 show. It was the strongest of the five line-ups on paper and in drawing power, but didn't sellout. For whatever this is worth, the number of non-Mexican American fans seemed much higher than at any of the previous five shows.

The response to the poll as far as comments go was every bit as overwhelmingly positive as the up/down ratio indicates, if not more. A huge percentage rated the show as the best PPV of the year, many saying the best in many years, some saying the best ever. Of the six non thumbs up votes, four of them specifically stated the quality of the matches was a positive but felt it was unforgivable for a show advertised as lasting 2:50 to end more than 40 minutes early, which is an inarguable point. The vast majority, for the first time ever in our poll, wouldn't even list a worst match with most saying no match on the show deserved the label. The poll response was the third most positive poll result in the history of the Observer, trailing only WCW shows in 1989 headlined by Flair vs. Steamboat in Nashville (100%) and Flair vs. Funk in Troy, NY (99.8%), two of the legendary matches in pro wrestling history.

The announcing was also heavily praised and probably got more comments than on any PPV I can recall. The duo of Chris Cruise and Mike Tenay, the former doing his first PPV broadcast and the latter doing his first television wrestling broadcast of any kind, introduced a new product and brought the product to life individualizing all the personalities, did an excellent job in getting across the storylines and background, and imparted their audience with more facts and tidbits than any announcing team on any PPV in history. While recognizing Tenay as easily the most well-researched and prepared announcer

ever on a PPV show and probably the only person in the country who could have pulled off this incredibly difficult assignment, my feelings on the announcing, an element far more important in introducing new wrestlers and a new style to the vast majority of their audience than any PPV in history except possibly UWF1 for the same reasons, was very positive overall but there were definite flaws. As mentioned before, they did an excellent job individualizing the wrestlers, breaking away from the job most lazy announcers would have done in just sleepwalking through a bunch of foreign names as we've seen done countless times before, particularly from WCW. Between that and educating the audience to new rules and a new style and getting virtually every key point needed across ahead of time which was no mean feat, they did a great job. Even Cruise doing the broadcast didn't seem to understand the captains fall aspect of the rules (to be honest, I even get confused about that) and the announcing intensity didn't go up and down with the ups and downs of the matches until the main event where the two did an excellent job. I didn't feel they got the intensity and drama of the hair vs. mask match over as well as it was in the building until perhaps the final minute, nor the quality of the moves over. Live that match was an unquestionable \*\*\*\*\* match and on PPV on the English feed didn't come off as a \*\*\*\*\* match. They did an absolutely tremendous job of getting the importance of the masks, particularly Santo's over, but then when the mask was in incredible jeopardy, they didn't get that jeopardy that was so huge in the building over to the television viewers. Often times while incredible moves were going on and even near falls, they weren't calling them which is the main drawback to the announcing in the Japanese-style semifinal match. It was a weird situation because a typical AAA match starts off slow for the first 5:00 and builds to big finishes three times, and those slow spots are perfect for the needed education, but because everyone panicked about time, the wrestlers in the ring went out too fast and there were no slow spots all night. They were in as difficult a position as any announcing duo ever, not just because of having to introduce a new product to a novice audience but because of the political instability of three promotions with no communication at all between them trying to run the same show at the same time and because of being assigned by WCW and not AAA, superlatives had to be tempered so as to not upset WCW higher-ups who would be embarrassed remarks that would lead the audience to making a comparison between the two products. Ironically, bi-lingual readers who saw the Spanish feed commented the mask vs. hair match was easy \*\*\*\*\* just as most I spoke with live did, an opinion apparently shared by only a small percentage who saw it on PPV in English.

I also had several other problems from a selling of the product standpoint in Cruise's constantly harping on the size (or lack thereof) of heel wrestlers Blue Panther and Fuerza Guerrera, which pretty much was the truth but has always in the past been considered a No-No in wrestling broadcasting where you never give the height of any wrestler less than either 6-0 or 6-2 in height or weight under 210 or 220, depending upon which part of the country and which promoter emphasized what number to the local announcer. In six years of Brian Pillman being in WCW, how many times have announcers given his real height? Zero. How many times did announcers give Tully Blanchard, or for that matter Ric Flair or Rick Steamboat's real height? Zero. Zero. Zero. Yet Rey Misterio Jr.'s height and weight (the latter figure no doubt taken right from these pages which was accurate as of eight weeks ago but was probably 20 pounds off on Sunday due to sudden weight gain syndrome) was mentioned a half dozen times. But since he's in the underdog role and his lack of size is actually an attribute in some ways, although saying 5-2 does somewhat expose the product. But that still wasn't nearly as bad as in the case of Guerrera or Panther. Giving Guerrera's real height of 5-3 killed much of the "heat" from a heel in this country when you realize no matter how stiff sounding the punch noise is and how solid his work is, the guy throwing it is as tall as a 12-year-old girl. This was even worse then Tony Schiavone killing the live heat at the Clash of the figure four that Flair had on Hogan saying that the hold put pressure on the leg that wasn't the one injured. If U.S. announcers would never, ever state the height of a top heel that was 5-10 or 5-11, or even a face for that matter, for fear of killing the heel aura, imagine what saying 5-3 does. In the second match, a \*\*\*\*\* match, I felt from the commentary I was watching Pony League baseball, or the Mexican team in the Little League World Series playing one hell of a great baseball game but that these weren't major league calibre players, when in fact quality-wise two of the six guys (Misterio Jr. and Psicosis) are among the top ten wrestlers in North America right now. Cruise tried to sell Misterio Jr. as

a guy who some day could be one of the biggest stars in Mexico when he already is an international star since the show was in California and he's a top star there already or he wouldn't have been on the show to begin with. Between that and the size made me think I'm watching a little kid who is an age group phenom someday could be a great pro rather than a guy who is already a major star and a great worker. They made up for it in the next match by being almost prophetic in regard to Tito Santana standing out in a negative way like a sore thumb before he even did. Tenay was excellent in making the product viewer-friendly (ie not particularly foreign) to the novice audience that had never seen it before, but Cruise's emphasis on Mexico hurt acceptance and marketability of the product by crossover fans in a country that does not support foreign entertainment except as occasional gimmick diversion or within its original ethnic group. The weakness of both announcers is there were key holds in regard to match storyline that weren't called, sometimes because they were giving background and sometimes because it appeared Cruise didn't know the name of the hold but Tenay didn't want to step over him and call play-by-play. I was surprised by the number of comments from people seeing their first show how they expected it to be more different and harder to grasp and instead simply saw it was a faster version of American wrestling with better wrestlers, or commented it was just like watching New Japan junior heavyweights. The difference in understanding the importance of this basic concept of the viewer having to believe it's a product aimed at him is important in contrasting the promotion, marketing and announcing of this show with UWFI, which is in a similar boat introducing a new style except that it doesn't have the huge ethnic base audience to start out with. UWFI is Japanese wrestling more than AAA is Mexican wrestling (since AAA's style is actually a conglomeration of Mexico, Japan and U.S. while UWFI is 100% Japanese shoot-style, and because UWFI never has and never will draw the kind of house show crowds AAA already has done in this country). UWFI never promotes its PPV shows in this country as either "Japanese wrestling" or "Pro-Resu" (Japanese equivalent of the English term pro wrestling or Spanish term Lucha Libre) because it would be ineffective marketing it as that in this country, in fact from a marketing standpoint, using the term in the manner WCW used the terms Mexican Wrestling when it's already crossed over into California to an English audience would be marketing death. UWFI went so far as to not even market itself as pro wrestling, but shootwrestling, because of the belief it brings with it a negative stigma when it comes to introducing a new version of the product in 1994 and its commercials that are running like crazy this week emphasizes the fact that are "better" than pro wrestling because they are real. In that regard, using the term Lucha Libre isn't as much a marketing negative but Mexican wrestling is. Cruise also mentioned there might be an added match, when there was never any plans for such nor any wrestlers backstage ready to do it, and only emphasized the viewers feeling of being ripped-off when the show ended early. Still, compared with the alternatives, the job Tony Schiavone would have done, or worse yet, Eric Bischoff, he was incredible. Cruise also mentioned time limits in various matches when every match on the show was announced in the ring introductions as no time limit. In addition, the lack of communication between the announcers and those in the truck was evident at the finish when they talked of Cruise going back for a Konnan interview, and then just as soon as he was gone, the show went off the air 40 minutes early. The announcers did come off as having more knowledge and credibility than any announcers on a PPV in recent memory, although there was no need to call the crowd a sellout crowd of 18,000 to 20,000 when it wasn't, just because the WCW lead announcers can't tell the truth if their lives would depend on it doesn't mean that's the lead that needs to be followed. Just because it was closer to a sellout or capacity than many WWF "sellouts" and virtually all WCW "capacity crowds" is not an excuse to lie when the truth is strong enough hype.

WCW made the call to end the show early. One can only speculate as to why. All those interviews that were taped never airing on TBS tells you what company's plan was on what wasn't going to happen. Before the show the directive was that there would be no interviews on the show for fear they didn't want to rush the matches, but hasn't anyone in wrestling ever heard of improv. Isn't that really what the business is all about? The problem "all-scripted" wrestling isn't as good as wrestling with less guidelines is because pro wrestling is best as improv, worst when made antiseptic, and not as script following to begin with. Officially the story was Gary Juster decided to end the show because he felt it was a super card and ending it at that point

would end it on a high note and didn't want to risk dragging it down by doing anything else. Unfortunately, based on calls, the decision was the single only thing that could have dragged the show down.

But when it comes right down to it, it was exactly as predicted beforehand. For match quality from start-to-finish, it was the best PPV of the year. Nothing even close to a bad match. Overall, despite the early ending and other flaws, most of which can be attributed to everyone involved being in the position they were in for the first time ever, it was right up there with Spring Stampede as the top PPV this year. The camera work and directing, handled by the WCW PPV crew, was excellent, much better than the work Mexican crews do on the AAA television show. However, none of the matches were typical AAA trios style with all six all over ringside so they didn't have as difficult a job keeping up as the Mexican crews would have, but for a novice crew, their performance deserves tremendous praise. The announcers, from WCW, overall did a good, sometimes excellent job, almost amazing for a first-time effort. To WCW's credit, it was a major positive they didn't allow their own wrestlers to appear on the show. Although Pegasus Kid proved to be the exception to the rule that bringing in outside talent to these shows hurts the matches and usually doesn't get over, how many wrestlers are there of his style versatility and calibre in the world today? Even Too Cold Scorpio had problems and he's a great flier and has worked in Mexico before although he would be a plus on these shows if he appears on AAA television first. Tito Santana, for reasons that aren't his fault, looked hopelessly lost and out of place and you can just imagine how bad Jake Roberts would have been in that match. It's not that Americans shouldn't be used--Love Machine in some aspects is the best all-around performer in the group, Eddy Guerrero was easily the best pure wrestler on the card that night and Madonna's Boyfriend had no problems at all, but all three work with the group. The communication with the wrestlers in regard to time was totally abhorrent and the real negative is that the matches were all rushed, which wound up ending the show 40 minutes early. I can see how it happened in the early matches, because everyone was so paranoid of going long and for good reason based on past four hour house shows. But when there is 1:40 left in a show and two matches left, and you've got on paper the best match of the show about to go out with four (well, three-and-a-half) excellent workers in a tag match who if need be, can go almost forever, why didn't someone tell them the show is running short and they need a 50 minute match and instead of them being told they needed to speed up their match of all things. Or why, after they were done, didn't they hold the show up, take an intermission live, and kill time doing interviews backstage. I hate to even be suspicious of this because it just may be a series of mistakes that lead one to a wrong conclusion about motives, yet everything continually over the past nine weeks points to this. WCW was afraid that some personalities and the concept might get over big if it was pushed on television or if some of the guys were allowed to talk, particularly in the English language and particularly if they were better than WCW performers. The nature of the thought process in the wrestling business also leads to this conclusion. There appeared to be so much paranoia or total ignorance on WCW's part and worse, total lack of interest in learning, in all aspects of promotion and execution that it resulted in botched up aspects of the show and virtually non-existent promotion of the show except to the Spanish speaking audience.

The show was a better show, ironically enough, to those who were watching the product for the first time and had no expectations, because it is right now the most advanced in-ring wrestling product in the world and was seen for the first time by numerous fans, then for those who were regular viewers. Although the mask vs. hair was the single best match I've seen since going to AAA shows, overall judged in comparison with the regular house shows I've seen in Los Angeles and Tijuana this year, it wasn't as good as many of them and couldn't touch TripleMania II-B in Guadalajara but was better than TM II-C.

The regular fans at the Sports Arena saw the product changes all for the negative such as the elimination of the standard entrance music. In some cases with American songs like Van Halen's "Jump" for Love Machine & Eddy Guerrero had problems being used because of royalty fees because the show was on PPV although we had heard word that AAA President Antonio Pena was either willing to or had paid royalty rights for one night for those songs. But many entrance songs such as Perro Aguayo, El Hijo del Santo and Blue Panther's associated with

the product didn't require royalty fees but still weren't used for reasons nobody had an explanation for. They eliminated the flamboyant individualized entrances with props and models. There wasn't even a ramp, which both major WCW and AAA shows each use for ring entrances. They cut two-of-three fall matches down to one fall and cut what fans expect to be three-and-a-half to four hour house shows down to two hours, all of which will hurt at the gate for AAA when it returns to Los Angeles. A dark match was scheduled live with Al Snow flown in from Ohio (Mando Guerrero wasn't there to be his foe, but instead they had brought in a wrestler from Northern California) which WCW officials pulled from the show at the last minute. That wasn't a negative to the show at all, since the only people who even knew about it were Observer readers since it was never advertised to the fans there would be a dark match, but serves another illustration at the total communication problems between all sides. Still, when it was over, the comments were the matches were great, but it felt like you were watching AAA wrestlers perform on a WCW show rather than getting the flavor of an AAA show. While there are many things WCW does better than AAA, putting on shows is definitely not one of them. If there is one thing made obvious by attempts from Americans to change anything about the house show aspect of the product is that in 95% of the cases, in hindsight, those changes are negatives. If the aforementioned problems can be worked out before the next show, it still may be, if the buy rate indicates profitability or even anywhere near profitability because correctly promoted the next PPV should do tons more business than this did, best for all concerned to continue the AAA/IWC/WCW relationship for the short term, but WCW is going to have to give up attempting to interfere with the show aspect because nobody involved with the company besides Tenay has a clue what the product really is, why it works, and how to maximize its potential. If they can't do a show without giving up their say-so on the product, it's best for all concerned to go their separate ways now. Ultimately for AAA to reach its potential in this country, the groups at some point will have to go their separate ways. But until AAA has its own English language television show, it isn't time for them to make that move unless WCW forces them by not giving up interfering in the show or by another round of reneging on virtually all promised television promotion which will be the confirmation of all suspicions.

1. Mascarita Sagrada & Octagoncito defeated Espectrito & Jerrito Estrada in the minis match in 8:46. Octagoncito and Espectrito did a super opening spot. Unfortunately, the sound went out for about 3:00 in this match due to satellite problems. This was during the heels getting heat phase. The finish was the faces come back with one incredible move after another. Sagrada did a twisting crossbody off the middle rope to the floor on Espectrito and Octagoncito did a tope onto Estrada. Back in the ring, Sagrada did a moonsault bodyblock on Espectrito for the pin followed by Octagoncito doing the leg sweep and Octagon special submission on Estrada. The match was excellent, although too short which was the lone drawback. \*\*\*\*

2. Fuerza Guerrera & Madonna's Boyfriend & Psicosis defeated Rey Misterio Jr. & Heavy Metal & Latin Lover in 12:54. This was the Rey Misterio one-man show, with him doing a Frankensteiner off the top rope, a Frankensteiner off the apron onto the floor, etc. Live Metal blew some spots and sulked in the corner but that didn't come across on television. Heavy has really been having his problems of late and I hope he can overcome because he is potentially the second most talented wrestler (behind Shawn Michaels) on the continent but hasn't wrestled at all like that of late. Misterio was press-slammed by Boyfriend and thrown three rows deep. He climaxed it with a leap off the top rope like a missile going down with a head-butt onto the floor on Boyfriend. Finally Guerrera made Metal submit to the chicken wing. Because of Misterio, this was an excellent match, but again too short to be rated any higher. \*\*\*\*

3. Pegasus Kid & Too Cold Scorpio & Tito Santana defeated Jerry Estrada & La Parka & Blue Panther in 14:51. This match was a dual purpose. First off, Pegasus Kid was unbelievable, and Panther was great working with him. Parka and Estrada did their deal designed to turn Parka face. Scorpio was pretty rough in spots but good in others. Santana was totally lost, but at least was in the ring very little. Most of the match saw Parka and Estrada argue. Pegasus did a mid-air twist into a sunset flip. He also suplexed Panther over the top rope and followed it with a tope. The fan reaction was interesting here. The Pegasus team was supposed to be the faces since the Mexicans are

all traditional heels. However, Pegasus came out to very mild polite applause because the fans know him from Ch. 22 EMLL tapes since he was on a few months back as Vampiro's tag team partner as a face. The fans didn't have a clue who Scorpio was. I expected fans to cheer Santana because he was always popular with Mexicans in Los Angeles but he was booed. All three heels were booed coming out but once the bout started, the crowd totally got into the Mexican team as the favorites even though they played heel. Pegasus missed a diving head-butt on Panther and Scorpio missed a moonsault on Panther. At one point Scorpio was ready to be pinned and Parka and Estrada kept fighting amongst one another and breaking up each others near falls on Scorpio. Santana came in for a quick spot and was again a fish out of water. Estrada held Santana for Parka to tope him but Santana moved and Parka tope'd Estrada. Scorpio then came off the top rope with a crossbody but the heels moved and he hit Santana. At this point, Parka and Estrada were going at it on the floor and Pegasus was in with Panther going back-and-forth with near falls until Pegasus turned Panther's attempt at a power bomb into a huracanrana. \*\*\*1/2

4. Octagon & El Hijo del Santo defeated Love Machine & Eddy Guerrero in a 2/3 fall double mask vs. double hair match in 22:29. First fall saw the Gringo Locos debut a move where Machine had Santo on his shoulders and Guerrero came off the top rope with a Frankensteiner which is the first time anyone can recall anyone pulling the move off (Shinjiro Otani & Wild Pegasus tried the move in the finals of the SG jr. tag league a few weeks back on Guerrero himself but Otani didn't hit it right). That was the first pin. Guerrero then superplexed Octagon off the top rope and Machine splashed him for the pin, which is known as the Power & Glory finisher taken from the former WWF tag team that invented the finisher. Santo & Octagon did a double tope after making a second fall comeback. Guerrero then did a Frankensteiner off the top and pinned Santo, meaning Octagon had to pin both or they'd go down in straight falls. Machine backdropped Octagon, who turned the move into a Frankensteiner on Guerrero for the surprise pin. Octagon then hit his leg sweep and Octagon special submission to even the score. Third fall saw one near fall after another with Santo and Guerrero. Guerrero tried for a submission on Santo with the camel clutch but Octagon broke it up. Santo got the camel clutch on Guerrero but Machine superkicked his brains out. Machine got the STF on Santo but Octagon literally punted Machine. Guerrero got the Gori especial on Octagon but Santo saved. Santo did a backward superplex on Guerrero but Machine saved. Machine & Guerrero did a double tope although Guerrero got his legs caught in the ropes going through. Santo reversed a superplex into a super gordbuster for a near fall, and later did a sunset flip over the top rope to the floor onto Guerrero and neither man killed the other. Finally, behind ref Tirantes' back, Machine gave Octagon the martinete (tombstone piledriver), the deadly finisher and scored the pin, leaving Santo against both. The Gringo Locos did a combo clothesline and german suplex on Santo who kicked out. They did the Power & Glory on Santo who kicked out. Santo recovered with a Santo dive on Guerrero. At this point Machine was on the top rope ready to do a plancha on Santo but Blue Panther (Machine's most hated enemy which was probably the single only cognizant fact that Tenay & Cruise didn't bring up) knocked Machine off the top rope and gave him a regular piledriver (in Mexico the regular piledriver is both illegal and devastating but not as devastating as the tombstone (don't ask why, it's just one of those pro wrestling truisms, which is why Octagon went out in an ambulance and Machine didn't). Santo pinned Machine which left Santo with Guerrero. Guerrero used a Liger bomb for a near fall, a belly-to-belly superplex for a near fall, a Frankensteiner off the top for a near fall, a dragon suplex for a near fall, and when he went for the second dragon suplex, Santo reversed it into a cradle to score the pin in 22:29. After the match Machine & Guerrero cut most of their hair off with scissors before going backstage and getting the rest taken off (they showed a clip later in the show of Guerrero getting shaved backstage with the electric razor). Live this was one of the best matches I've ever seen and one of the two best matches of the year in the United States. \*\*\*\*\*

5. Perro Aguayo beat Konnan El Barbaro in a steel cage match in 17:54. This match was weird, but it was actually better on PPV than live because there was so much drama and storyline to it. The work was pretty basic, at some points not good and good in other points, but bloody as hell. They used the over-the-top-and-out cage match rule which always hurts matches of these types. An interesting trivia note is that Aguayo, even though he's been wrestling for 25 years, had never



been in a cage match. Konnan gave Aguayo two hotshots into the cage and he juiced at 3:00. There was another miscommunication with ref Pepe Casas counting falls and them doing pins attempts early when pins didn't count. Aguayo's comeback usually wound up with his double foot stomps. As Aguayo was taking control, Guerrero and Boyfriend came out and threw a coke in Aguayo's eyes and Guerrero threw Brass Knux to Konnan. Konnan gave Aguayo three shots with the Knux to bloody him up. Probably the single best or worst camera shot in history was the crevices in Aguayo's forehead beating shoved into the cage and the incredible amount of blood that flowed. Konnan then hit the Niagara driver. He kept up on Aguayo who was bloody until Los Hermanos Dinamita did a run-in which blew the top off the place. Konnan climbed the cage and was about to get out when Cien Caras punched Konnan, who crotched himself on the top rope and fell in. Aguayo did the double foot stomp off the top rope on Konnan and escaped to win the match. The only negative was at some point a fan hit Guerrero, who lost his cool and forgot about the show and went after the fan. Konnan went into the crowd and there was genuine fear a riot could happen. It was amazing to see the crowd back up when Konnan got in as a contrast to American crowd who laugh in the face of the wrestlers when they threaten them. Of course I have little doubt Konnan would have hit anyone who tried anything. Aguayo wound up going in the crowd and quelling everything down. Aguayo is old with no fancy moves and not what one watching him for the first time would consider a great worker, but nobody that age in this business works harder, has more fire and intensity and builds drama like he can. \*\*\*1/2

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NOVEMBER 21, 1994

### SHOOTFIGHTING III

Thumbs up 51 (100.0%)

Thumbs down 0 (0.0%)

In the middle 0 (0.0%)

### BEST MATCH POLL

Nobuhiko Takada vs. Gary Albright 26

Nelson & Lydick vs. Sakuraba & Kakahara 17

### WORST MATCH POLL

Billy Scott vs. Yoshihiro Takayama 16

Tom Burton vs. Hiromitsu Kanehara 7

### WHEN WORLDS COLLIDE FINAL POLL RESULTS

Thumbs up 449 (98.0%)

Thumbs down 5 (01.1%)

In the middle 4 (00.9%)

### BEST MATCH POLL

Santo & Octagon vs. Machine & Guerrero 323

Konnan vs. Perro Aguayo 51

Misterio Jr. & Metal & Lover vs. Guerrero & Psicosis & Boyfriend 36

Espectrito & Estrada vs. Octagoncito & Sagrada 31

### WORST MATCH POLL

Santana & Pegasus & Scorpio vs. Panther & Parka & Estrada 83

Konnan vs. Perro Aguayo 55

Misterio Jr. & Metal & Lover vs. Guerrero & Psicosis & Boyfriend 25

Based on phone calls, letters and fax messages to the Observer as of Monday, 11/14. Statistical margin of error: +-100%

It's a really exciting time to be a wrestling fan in the United States because as a widely-known saying goes, variety is the spice of life, and as a not-so-widely known saying goes, for pro wrestling to thrive, the only thing that can remain the same is constant change.

We are ending an era of wrestling that started ten years ago. It may be over already, or it may have a year or two left. But it is an era that is ending. On January 23, 1984, the new era of pro wrestling, one which initially thrived and the past few years has struggled, began when Hulk Hogan legdropped the Iron Sheik. Six months later Cyndi Lauper brought it to the attention of a new audience, the media picked up on it, and a boom period started. Forget that the reality of the situation was that the boom period of actual great interest, huge ratings and big crowds started years earlier and the media caught the tail end, but this coincided with some technological advances and the business was off and running in a new direction. The architect of the new era was Vince McMahon, and the rest of the wrestling business in the United States spent the first few years laughing at his ignorance, figuring he was spending too much money and would tap himself out. Even when it was obvious during a week in late March of 1985 when Wrestlemania became a cultural symbol due to the appearance of a charismatic, no-talent actor named Mr. T who was in the middle of his own huge run, that McMahon's new concept had revolutionized the business, most of the established promoters took solace in the fact that much of what he was doing was "wrong," thus wouldn't work, even as it was working right before their eyes. Unfortunately, those truisms that they were raised on had all become false. The problem at that time was it's almost impossible to convince people who know it all that times have changed and that unless they adapt, that knowledge of the past is useless. Never was this exemplified more than when WCW brought in Bill Watts to run the company in 1992. Make no mistake about it. Bill Watts was one of the great minds in pro wrestling and took a third-rate territory in Louisiana and Oklahoma and set it on fire. If timing and luck, and a lot of money, had been on his side, in late 1983 and 1984 he would have been a major force on the national scene. By the time he made the try, it was too late because the young stars he had at the perfect time in their lives and the perfect scenarios, which was in early 1984, had by then moved on to greener pastures. By 1992, the same person, no less intelligent, was completely out of place because the industry and its fans had totally changed, but he held to those same basic truisms that had become false. The same truisms that put all those of his era, with one exception since he never believed those truisms to begin with, out of business. After that week in March of 1985, for economic reasons as much as anything else, the regional promotions were pretty much all doomed because the money in the industry switched from running seven-nights-a-week to building to big shows, and the national promotions had the advantage of PPV marketing to turn the old version of a huge house of \$100,000 to potential multi-million dollar evenings. A good national group could take in more money on a strong night than a strong regional could in a strong year. Talent all wants to be where the money is, and pro wrestling isn't yet a strong enough or diverse enough part of the American culture that fans of the sport will in great numbers support what they believe to be minor league talent when they have a major league alternative. Somehow Jerry Jarrett survived all this, but he was the only one, and even his business has never since nor never will reach its pre-1985 level.

This is not the obituary of WWF or WCW, or a prediction that AAA will take the United States by storm. But that era has been on the downslide for a few years and the only way for wrestling to rebound is

with a new era and new concepts. That's more than coming up with a slogan, that's coming up with a reality. The situation is this. WWF is surviving largely on one thing. The initials W-W-F. Those initials just three years ago were a part of the U.S. entertainment scene of a strong cult level of significance, and of late have been an even stronger part of the European entertainment scene as some American fad imported across the Ocean. In addition, they tailored made-for-PPV events that got in on the ground floor as a new medium of entertainment was reaching America. PPV wrestling is here to stay and will be the prime medium for making money no matter how the business creative wise changes. They also capitalized on the surge of cable television looking for product time to hit a strong niche audience, something pro wrestling always had, actually moreso before the WWF revolution. We are primed and ready for this with the so-called information explosion and 500 channel cables said to be just a few years away. WWF got in on the ground floor and made a mint. The key for the rebirth is getting in on the ground floor of the next wave. Ironically, the company in the cable television drivers' seat, the old Georgia Championship Wrestling company, had no idea what it had and even less of an idea of how to pull it off, still being blinded by adhering to the past.

WCW survived because it was on life support systems from Turner Broadcasting, which used the group to fill television time with new programming that drew largely decent ratings, and gave them hope of turning around the mountains of red ink because of the future economic potential of PPV, something pro wrestling is tailor made for. Today WCW is in the process of losing its core audience, which was an audience too small for it to economically be viable, something its core audience, many of whom read this publication, has to accept because it is now historical fact. We all know the blundering involved and the reasons and it could have been different if things had been different five years ago, but the past is only something to learn from, not something to try and re-do. Those hoping for the return of the Ric Flair who was the greatest of all-time should let it go and accept Flair's place in history and prime themselves to watch a new wave wrestler learn from Flair's style, modernize it, and surpass him. It won't be easy, but someday, and it may take a long time, it will happen. Today and next year and maybe the year after, WCW will survive based on two things. Hulk Hogan and Uncle Ted's money. Double H is a star and he is a celebrity and his name means far more than any other when it comes to general public name recognition. But he is also living off a reputation from the past and his fame is that of a guy who used to be a big deal in the culture. He's closer to Bob Dylan than to the Rolling Stones, but since wrestling doesn't have any Rolling Stones, or any ideas on what new bands are out there, he's the best WCW is going to come up with. This translates into some casual audience interest in him on special live shows and PPV, although not in week-to-week storylines. But like WWF, they are surviving off a reputation from the past. And like WWF and despite a slogan to the contrary, they are presenting a tired product form of pro wrestling that is losing viewers and fans faster than it is gaining new fans.

Never was that more obvious than in the past week. Forget about buy rates of the AAA and UWFI PPV shows, because those groups are in their infancy in that venue and buy rates are determined by marketing and exposure levels. Neither group had anything to speak of in either category. Multi-Channel News is reporting the AAA show will do an estimated 0.3 buy rate (other sources are pegging the figure at 0.25, or approximately 55,000 buys and an estimated \$500,000 after split gross), which considering the exposure level in this country and marketing force behind it, has to be considered a miracle when compared with what WWF and WCW are doing nowadays with an exponentially greater push, hype and exposure levels. If that's the case, the show will break even or be marginally profitable, which would show that as a product, they are, to borrow an expression, almost bullet proof. That takes on dual meaning since their partners on the show almost appeared to have been shooting at them in many cases instead of promoting them. Done correctly, the product is a winner. UWFI is not a guaranteed winner by any means, and as the poll showed, after its first PPV did quite well, it hasn't held up as far as interest is concerned due to failure to capitalize on the first show. But they brought something new to wrestling on 11/11, realism, drama, believable brutality without gratuitous violence, and strategy all coming from the best announcing on any wrestling show in years in Sam Rosen (New York Rangers play-by-play voice) and Jeff Blatnick (1980 Olympic gold medalist in Greco-Roman wrestling). Rosen and Blatnick,

like AAA's Mike Tenay, were both doing their first pro wrestling broadcast ever, and when three announcers in the past week, all doing the first-ever pro wrestling event, all were better than almost all full-time announcers, it really exposes just how bad the current crop are.

There are numerous things I've learned and opinions that have been shaped about pro wrestling and the business by the events of the past week.

1) When put in almost a test-marketing position as a new product as Sunday's show was, AAA is a huge success, to both those who are and aren't traditional pro wrestling fans. The group it may have the most problems with is the traditional older wrestling fan (although it did well with that demo as well as exemplified by the poll) who won't accept it because it isn't the wrestling they learned and grew up with. If it attempts to change to satisfy that group or to satisfy American promoters, it's doomed

2) Those in charge of the wrestling business in America have proven themselves dinosaurs this past week, not because the AAA or UWFI put on good PPV shows, but because they weren't willing to open their minds to new concepts those shows introduced--the classic symptom of the Bill Watts disease. Eric Bischoff, the "young" new breed of wrestling exec, was not only not even at the show where he could have learned more new in one night in Los Angeles about both the work in the ring and how to put on a show than he has in the last 37 years of his life, didn't even watch the show on PPV. He instead took this past week off to go on a hunting trip. Others in the company saw the show, most liked it, some didn't, most realized it was a huge success as a show, but did any understand why? That's not a negative either, nor does it make them dinosaurs. What makes them dinosaurs is that after it was over and it was an obvious success, almost nobody asked questions as to how and why, and nobody was thinking of lessons learned by the show that could be used to elevate their own product. What makes them dinosaurs is that in Los Angeles, three of AAA's first four house shows leading up to this drew more money than any show in the history of WCW, and nobody from WCW took the time to try and find out why. Will WCW promote faster-paced more high-flying innovative matches? Will their announcers try to put reality into their broadcasts? Will they change the type of wrestler they hire? Will they elevate the quality of television matches? Will they modernize the ring introductions and have better quality entrance music? In this regard, WCW was joined by various other people within the wrestling establishment that make their livings covering a business that has already gone through some major changes and is about to go through more. Some are my friends, some aren't, but I urge you all to please heed the example of one Cowboy and don't get caught in the same trap when the business changes. Just as in 1984, a lot of people had to play catch-up to catch the wave, a lot of others got caught up in the wave and never made it back to shore. The regional territories aren't what's coming back. A variety of styles, all the ones that have a chance of making it being different from what is being offered by WWF and WCW today, on PPV and cable, is what's coming in and has a chance, more of a chance now than ever before

3) I have no idea if Vince McMahon watched the show or not. But Titan, while the most innovative wrestling company in the world during its heyday, has failed to learn or try anything new except pushing smaller guys (largely forced on them rather than by choice) and copying live show production values from the NBA and NHL (which foreign groups had picked up on two years earlier) over the past few years. The key is, Titan learned very little from the Japanese in recent years, to the point they arrogantly brought their dated product to Japan this past spring, looked up their noses at those there who tried to teach them to bring it to 1994, and died in the country where pro wrestling is far more popular in than any other. Forget about saying Bret Hart can't draw or Undertaker isn't drawing. The WWF's problem, besides lack of talent depth which is a huge problem, is they failed to maintain what made them No. 1--being ahead of the pack. They stayed ahead of the pack in the U.S. recent years because the pack never moved, not because they kept moving, but lost that position on an international level. On a world scene, the pack passed them by several years ago and they still haven't realized it, and hopefully this weekend will wake them up to that fact. The Japanese were the new innovators in this business after McMahon's era and they failed to pick up anything from them.

(4) Today's new innovator when it comes to presenting a live product is Antonio Pena. And why? In 1994, Pena will have attended New Japan's Tokyo Dome, WWF's Wrestlemania, WCW's Bash at the Beach, All Japan women's Tokyo Dome, not to mention run several major shows himself. He sat there and graded the matches and the shows. How many major shows from other promotions did Bischoff attend? One. New Japan's Fukuoka Dome. How many concepts did he bring back with him from Japan? How many did McMahon attend? Zero. McMahon is a brilliant guy in his own way, but it's scary to see him act like Watts would in the same circumstances (and even Watts attended three nights of New Japan at Sumo Hall and paid great attention but conceptually only picked up what he already knew) which is, since he already knows and understands it better than anyone, there's nothing left to learn from others. The day you hit that position is the day time starts passing you by. This past week is the warning call to both promotions. Both are not on top in this country, for whatever being on top is worth, because they present better house shows, better PPV shows, or more creative television than anyone else, despite what they may delude themselves into believing. They are on top because of greater exposure and an established base of fans. Both groups have one significant thing--the initials WWF or the name Hulk Hogan, that allows them to have something of a following based on clinging to the dwindling audience of the past. Remember Hogan's own words some eight years ago about pro wrestling was going nowhere catering to the old and dwindling audience. Remember those words. Whether Pena and those associated with him such as Ron Skoler can capitalize is a story for 1995 and 1996 and there are probably two reasons they can't for every reason they can. But to deny that Pena is the new innovator when it comes to producing shows and his wrestlers are when it comes to ring style, as stated here two weeks ago, after last Sunday, is to bury one's head in the sand. The next few months will tell the tale, but if Titan fails to learn from the new innovators, Vince McMahon is on the road to becoming Bill Watts. He's got the advantage that he's got a past he can survive off for several more years, just as if Watts maintained his position with WCW, the company would have survived but it never would have increased its popularity. The scary sign that may be closer to the truth than anyone realizes comes from McMahon himself in his 10/5 television interview with Chet Coppock where he stated, "There's a big difference in philosophy in what we do as compared to the wrestling of old." After ten years of saying that, he hasn't realized the sad point. In 1995, what he does, IS the wrestling of old.

5) Jeff Blatnick on Friday night did the single greatest job of color commentary in the modern history of pro wrestling. He re-defined the role. It's a shame nobody saw it, but don't let the lesson to be learned from it go to waste. No, he specifically probably would never do a WWF or WCW style pro wrestling broadcast and his style wouldn't fit like a glove as it did with UWFI, but the key job of the announcer on any form of pro wrestling is a universal thing, to get the product over and make it interesting to the viewers and Blatnick excelled in that role. The UWFI PPV show was the first show made by the announcers. Forget about Mike Tenay, although Tenay himself recognized the job Blatnick did and was in awe of it. Blatnick, who has also signed to do a color on UFC IV, was in another league. Granted, he had one major advantage, doing a post-produced instead of a live show (an advantage everyone working in traditional pro wrestling has every week on television). But his style exposed just how tired the old really is. In 1985, Jesse Ventura ushered in a new era, and the rest of the world copied. The heel commentator giving the babyface announcer heat and coming up with cute one-liners. It was different and it was cool. Bobby Heenan took that role and eventually surpassed Ventura. After Heenan comes the parade of imitators, from Jerry Lawler, who is a very funny individual playing an extremely stale role who has really gone downhill of late, to Randy Savage, who has been awful for a long time, to Larry Zbyszko. That's why Tenay, and moreso Blatnick, were so impressive this past week. They gave the shows credibility, a lost quality and something badly needed in a product which destroyed its popularity through its own excesses and can't regain its lost audience because it severed credibility with them years ago. Todd Pettingill is a great young version of Gene Okerlund. But hopefully Pettingill realizes that could be a big problem. Gene Okerlund is a dinosaur clinging to his past glory. The role playing announcers and carnival barker pitchmen are beyond stale and if their sell jobs worked so well, how could pro wrestling and pro wrestling type acts with no sell jobs of the type at all and no television be doing a similar number of buys? The monkey-see monkey-do followers who only know one way to produce

pro wrestling television--copy the 1987 WWF ideas but with poorer execution and production, have turned the product into a parody of itself that for a turnaround in business, it needs to totally break away from.

By not only really understanding the product (ironic since Lawler and Savage have wrestled for 20 years, while Tenay never stepped foot in a ring and Blatnick has never "worked") they are selling and how to sell it without coming off as con men, liars or fake characters, but having the ability to bring their understanding to a viewing public that doesn't, they exposed just how outdated the rest of the pack are. Instead of hitting their audience in the head with points which because of credibility problems, the audience doesn't accept to begin with, they subtly taught them what was going on without offending or talking down to them in the process. Blatnick made the slowest spots in a match exciting because every move and every spot was made as part of a multi-faceted grand strategy, and his post-match commentary sold a rematch far stronger than any obviously contrived hype job has been able to in a long time. He also understood that while Rosen had the vocal chords and announcing skill and ability to generate excitement, he didn't have the wrestling knowledge and it was his job to get all the points across and he aggressively did so, which would be the knock on Tenay not wanting to get in the way of Cruise's fall-by-fall when there were points in the match due to storyline or knowledge of AAA that Cruise didn't pick up through no fault of his own but simply because he wasn't as familiar with the product. To Blatnick's credit, he also didn't knock American style pro wrestling even though he had numerous openings to do so and most former amateur wrestlers relish the opportunity to knock the pros.

Think about this. With no television show, no marquee names, and no publicity machine behind it, UFC IV, which is nothing more than a remake of the original lure of pro wrestling, next month may beat the numbers on PPV that the biggest name in modern history with tons of television publicity could pull off ten days later. The public inherently wants to see a form of combat, either fake or real. But after the "sports entertainment" style has grown stale, people want something new, and groups with minuscule publicity in comparison with WWF and WCW are doing numbers on PPV that aren't in the WWF's league, but aren't all that far off WCW's buy rates. The form offered by the "big two" (a misnomer that was exposed in this country Sunday if ever there was one) has run its course and is surviving off its past glory. It will survive, don't get me wrong, because it's established and PPV is here to stay and enough money can be made to keep WWF financially viable for a long time and WCW breathing until somebody can convince Uncle Ted otherwise. But with correct promotion after 12 to 18 months of two language exposure, AAA would surpass WCW on PPV. It already has surpassed WCW as far as live gate is concerned.

There is a place in pro wrestling for one Bobby Heenan or someone like that if they are uniquely talented, and as someone different and thus special. But the role has been so overexposed that, forget about Hogan, the addition of Heenan to WCW broadcasts for nearly one year has resulted in no movement in cable rating, weaker syndicated ratings and numerous time slot demotions and cancellations. Heenan doesn't deserve the blame, it's a declining business, but as talented as he is, he no longer draws viewers to the shows because he's one of many playing the same role. It's the time for several Jeff Blatnick and Mike Tenay's, if there are any others of that calibre around, to take center stage and allow those different from them once again to be something special. The role of a Jerry Lawler, Ted DiBiase and Randy Savage, not those individuals but the current role they play as part of a television broadcast, are obsolete. The quicker those in charge realize it's time for sweeping changes, the quicker they will be to being cutting edge instead of surviving off remnants of the past and having their audience continue to dwindle.

6) Don't think I've forgotten that the best new style TV show in the world is produced in the United States and that not all the innovators are from another country. The ECW show is getting better by the week. ECW, by its overly violent nature, is limited in appeal, but it is on the verge of being a major cult force in the industry if it gets the right exposure. It will never be the No. 1 promotion in the United States, but there's no crime in that if it reaches a certain level of success and can build itself to the point it can produce profitable PPV shows, which is the future of wrestling. Forget about building the company around

house shows. That's also living in the past. ECW isn't ready for PPV right now because it doesn't have the exposure to do it profitably, but for it to make it, it would be to build up to several PPV per year, that won't do the big business others do, but are at least strong enough to be profitable. If it can appeal to and garner its own audience and create a new audience elsewhere (the groups that will be making it aren't going to do so by retrieving older or lost fans but by creating younger and newer fans that aren't fans or at least have no fan loyalty to WWF or WCW), it can become the United States version of FMW, with a higher quality of wrestlers. Let's not kid ourselves, FMW is one of the great success stories in modern pro wrestling. When was the last time any of the so-called major offices in the world (besides New Japan) drew 52,000 people to a show? Only in their promotional wet dreams. ECW is missing only two ingredients--exposure, and a certain wrestler to breakthrough mainstream like Onita did to sell the product past the very limited hardcore wrestling fan audience. Of course those are the two most difficult ingredients in every wrestling recipe

7) I don't think UWFI can make it in the United States, but am less positive of that statement after Friday. The company put its best foot forward, and it was an impressive foot at that. They presented matches that looked both real and believable, and also were exciting combining both brutality and psychology. Stylistically, right now it's a new concept to the American audience, too much like pro wrestling to be real, too real to be pro wrestling, with guys nobody has heard of, and an appeal similar to amateur wrestling, ie. none. The U.S. audience would be picking up a book and starting in Chapter eight when the first seven chapters are necessary to set the stage. While the same could be true for AAA, it has wider-based appeal since its more a show than hardcore sport. Judging from the response here, unlike the AAA show, this may have been the giant redwood falling in the empty forest. Nobody saw it. The problem it has in making it are more than others, because he doesn't have a base following or a hardcore following to build from. What it does have is an individual who has already proven he has the ability and charisma to breakthrough as a celebrity in Nobuhiko Takada. Culturally even the American promoters who ran the PPV know that no matter how much talent and charisma Takada has, because of language and that little tad of racism, he can't be the one to carry the product here

8) The babyface/heel era is on its way out. There will always to "good guys" and "bad guys" in pro wrestling just as there will always be the home team against the visiting team in sports, but the visitors to draw real heat don't have to take on unbelievably comedic roles or exaggerated roles. The outrageous overplayed characters are on the way out. Look at the total failure of The Gangstas, which should have gotten the most heat of anything in wrestling but it drifted too far. Hulk Hogan's the biggest draw, but throwing out the manipulations, half the people don't like him at all, although they'll still pay to see him. AAA was refreshing in that while it's heels wrestle dirtier, they don't overplay the roles as heels to ridiculous proportions and if the fans cheer them, nobody seems to care since they paid their money to get in. ECW, in appealing to a renegade group, has everyone play traditional heel, but in reality has little in the way of babyfaces and heels. Japan has been like this for ten years. People love Shawn Michaels and Diesel. Nobody gives a rats ass about Lex Luger although they'll pop for him when the music plays. People don't take the roles seriously. They never could do enough to get people to really hate Ric Flair no matter how hard they tried. Those overplayed roles can garner the Pavlovian response when they do the Pavlovian spots or musical pops, but what the AAA show exposed (and even UWFI to a totally different degree) is none of the crowd response comes from the heart.

Lost in the fact that Perro Aguayo did no moonsaults or topes was that this 48-year-old (they had the age wrong on the PPV, he turns 49 in January) man with limited ability walked from the ring, covered in blood, and woman 30 years younger wanted to kiss him, and not in a sex symbol or even a TV star kind of way. They reacted from the heart, not because they had been programmed by illusions created by mirrors on television that were exposed at the live arena like when seeing what appear on television with sweetened sound and post-production to be super-over WWF and WCW wrestlers live and nobody cares or reacts. Check out the crowd reaction at the second Takada-Albright fight and contrast it with 1-2-3 Kid & Razor Ramon vs. Shawn Michaels & Diesel, which was in most ways a better match. When Takada was in trouble, there was a real tenseness, and when he won,

there was a real explosion from the crowd. In the great WWF TV match of a few weeks ago with hot moves, a storyline, and a great last 5:00 of false finishes, I couldn't help but notice the steady stream throughout the match of fans walking around, not watching the ring, talking to their friends, going to the snack stand and watching this great match, one of the best TV matches of the year without a doubt, but not being into it to the point the match gripped them and took them over. The performance of the wrestlers couldn't be faulted. It was the product base that had failed the wrestlers. I thought that was something that was gone in wrestling watching that match, and saw it was still there one week later. If anyone in the hierarchy of American wrestling, seeing Perro Aguayo leave the ring on Sunday, still dismissed the reaction because the crowd was largely Mexican-American, they missed they may have seen the show with their eyes but completely missed the show with their head

(9) Different is what makes it big and when the old style is dying out, it's time for completely different. We've already seen that the steroid-monster type that used to get over no matter how little they could work, dating back to the Road Warriors and their clones, doesn't sell anymore. One of the lures of Royce Gracie is he's the smallest guy there. Takada, like Inoki before him, is a hero because the people believe he's capable of beating monsters. Before this current era, probably the greatest era in Japanese wrestling for business was the early 1980s New Japan, and while Tiger Mask and Dynamite Kid were not responsible for it, they added a major dimension to it and did create a product niche that exists and thrives to this day. The United States has never had its Tiger Mask, the charismatic gimmick hero to the kids who eventually wins the respect of the wrestling fans because he's got too much ability to deny. American promoters have never known how to get it over. All they had to do was see how New Japan got Tiger Mask over and they'd be 50% there. The other 50% is finding the right guy to fill the spot. They had the chance for the first time with Jushin Liger but we all saw how well that was handled. And also, because it was wrestlers running offices (Watts was in charge when WCW bungled up Liger's potential) who kept the truism alive that junior heavyweights could never draw money, a truism made ridiculous by Argentina Rocca and Gorgeous George on a national basis a generation ago. The U.S. has never had anyone that was put in the position to be the original Tiger Mask. There is a someone who is three years away from being this generation's and this country's Tiger Mask, and he's an American. He steals the show every night, has ability, charisma, durability and moves to pop eyeballs out. He can do it every night and has the durability to come back the next night and do it all over again. He can be a crossover star due to ability, an ethnic hero due to background, and a kids hero and merchandise seller due to gimmick, all at the same time. In three years, he'll be 22 years old and tons better then he is now because he improves noticeably every month when it comes to working ability. The guy who got over to a new audience last week as much as anyone on a show filled with more great wrestling than any other big show on PPV this year. Rey Mysterio Jr. And the way things are now, he's the last guy on the show that would be considered by an American group. Ridiculously too small. The reaction within wrestling to this suggestion would be it's the biggest joke ever suggested and proof that the person suggesting it doesn't know the first thing about wrestling. That's why it would work huge if handled correctly, which would mean to do it in a manner totally different than anything done in this country and in a manner where he's protected from his true lack of size being exposed in comparison with heavyweight wrestlers. Satoru Sayama was 5-6, 165 when he first got over, and he never would have gotten over had he been put in regularly with large men that would expose his lack of size. Got over in a country where pro wrestling had been previously dominated by big men. Got over in a country where there was no history of anyone that size ever meaning anything at the gate. Got over far more than any wrestler is over in our country today or will be for years. Got over to the point that eight years after he retired, when videos of his matches were re-released, they grossed millions of dollars such was the lasting impact of his legend because sons wanted to see what their fathers had told them about and little brothers wanted to see what big brothers had told them. Got over so big that he still can be a guest on TV talk shows and everyone knows who he is even though he's done almost nothing in years, and when he's on, they still air clips of his matches from 1981-83, 11-13 years after the fact. Got over to the point he set the stage for viable promotions within his country to be filled with men his size or smaller. Please tell me that will be the case with Bret Hart, Undertaker, Sting or even Ric Flair. In three years, barring injury and

with the right kind of promotion (the key part of the equation which isn't going to happen), Rey Misterio Jr. will be more marketable in this country than Shawn Michaels. He has more potential in the United States than in Mexico, because in Mexico they've seen plenty of guys like him who are almost as good as him, for the same reason Satoru Sayama got over bigger in Japan than in Mexico because there are more smaller wrestlers in Mexico. Misterio Jr. is different, different enough to be a major star in Mexico at his size but not different enough to be a revelation. The U.S. has never seen anyone like him. Michaels may end up being the greatest worker of all-time, but he'll never be a revelation.

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UWFI presented its third PPV show on 11/11, a taped 1:50 show billed as "Shootwrestling III." The show aired six matches, four of which were from a show taped 6/10 at Tokyo's Budokan Hall. The announcers, doing the commentary in studio months later via post production, were giving the impression it was live. It was the best of the group's three efforts on PPV, both from a presentation and match quality standpoint. The storyline of the show was largely built around building to the main event, a match with Gary Albright against Nobuhiko Takada. Takada was billed as Japan's No. 1 shootwrestler with no acknowledgement of Takada's world heavyweight title (which he had at the time the match was taped but has since lost to Vader) which the first two PPV shows were built around. They built the match from the beginning, showed both men warming up before the match and did an interview with Albright, and ran bumpers throughout the show continuing the hype. Even though they were new people to the majority of the viewing audience, by the time they reached the main event, the viewer was not only familiar with them but excited to see them wrestle. They introduced the highest degree of realism to the match as any pro wrestling match in recent memory. They then aired a short clip of the first match between the two in 1992 (which Albright won), and a lengthy clip showing most of their second match (which Takada won), which was an outstanding match. After airing a great main event match, with Albright's size, power and suplex ability contrasted by Takada's speed, stamina and striking ability, which Takada won via submission after making a comeback with a devastating flurry of kicks, they did an interview with Albright and an excellent commentary from Blatnick on what Albright would need to do to win a rematch (which actually takes place on 11/30).

The show opened with Hiromitsu Kanehara beating sometime WCW jobber Tom Burton in a very stiff typical UWFI style prelim match. Burton did a believable sports-like interview after the match. Then came a great match with Steve Nelson (who I believe is the son of former pro wrestler Gordon "Mr. Wrestling" Nelson), an American champion in sambo (submission) wrestling teaming with Jean Lydick against Masahito Kakiyara & Kazushi Sakuraba. Kakiyara was amazing with his hand and foot speed. He and Kiyoshi Tamura are the future of this promotion. This match was brutal with excellent psychology and hot moves and was both realistic and entertaining at the same time. If the style reaches the level that matches are consistently at this level (combined with the all-important exposure), this group has a chance. Sakuraba was the weak link in the match and the American team kept him in the ring most of the way which gave the match almost an American tag team like psychology. But Sakuraba was impressive in his own right, particularly when considering he's only a rookie, especially in his explosive comebacks. Nelson finally suplexed Sakuraba on his head, tagged to Lydick who put him away via knockout after a belly-to-back suplex and an unprotected german suplex. The brutality and believability aspect was sold great after the match during an interview where they showed Nelson's thigh bruised up beyond belief. Next up was Billy Scott, best known for being Takada's "Rocky-like" opponent on the first PPV show, against UWFI's largest Japanese wrestler, 6-5 Yoshihiro Takayama. Takayama looked green and because of long limbs and a high center of gravity, actually made his height appear to be a disadvantage, something the commentators pointed out which also sells the idea of having shorter guys as stars. The match started slow. It was the worst match on the show, but had a good finish with Scott using a leg drag into a half crab for the submission. The final prelim match saw Naoki Sano, best known for his matches of the year with Jushin Liger in 1990 while with New Japan, teaming with Yoji Anjyo against former Russian amateur greats Vladimir Berkovitch & Victor Zangiev. Unlike the rest of the

show, this match was actually taped on 8/18 at the same Budokan Hall. Zangiev has gained some weight and wasn't as impressive as in Shootwrestling II. Berkovitch is really out of shape now and looked bad. The finish saw Anjyo batter Zangiev with kicks leading to a very believable looking knockout. On television it looked far better than the knockout George Foreman delivered one week earlier. Even though the working aspect of this match wasn't great because of the Russians, the blows at the end gave it enough realism that it was watchable and successful in getting the style over.

## WHEN WORLDS COLLIDE

I found When World's Collide to be a refreshing change from the last few PPV shows WCW has put on. What struck me the most was the high workrate, the lack of restholds, the absence of emphasis on the face/heel roles and the quick pacing of all the matches. Despite predictions in the Observer of screw-job finishes and bad camera work, neither existed. I think When World's Collide is a precursor to the future of wrestling. As the information explosion continues, fans will have more wrestling styles to choose from. The wrestling styles won't be limited in the United States to WWF and WCW. Just as manufactured goods are sourced globally, so will pro wrestling. This doesn't bode well for the future of styles of wrestling that offer a stale, boring product.

Daniel Chornomaz

Branchburg, New Jersey

Huge thumbs up. The best PPV of 1994. No wonder WCW did so little to help the show get over since it blows away every WCW PPV since 1989. The show was made even better by the tremendous job done by Chris Cruise and Mike Tenay on play-by-play. They were awesome in providing background on the history of the wrestlers and the significance of their masks or family heritage. Cruise called 95% of the holds correctly and his genuine excitement added great drama to all of the matches. Tenay was even better. His knowledge of the rules and customs made Jim Ross pale in comparison. I can't believe it was his first TV broadcast. If WCW revives the Japan Super Show concept or does future AAA shows, Tenay and Cruise are the only announcers who have any business calling the action. They were as good as Jim Ross in 1989 and Vince McMahon of 1982.

Give credit to the WCW production staff. They hardly missed any of the great high spots and there were enough of them so they had enough chances to miss. They kept the cameras panned back when the action got hot and went for very few close-up shots. It's those close-up shots in the past that led to missing so much action on other PPV shows.

Best match was Octagoncito & Mascarita Sagrada vs. Estrada & Espectrito. This match was just as good as the double hair vs. double mask match and they did more spectacular high spots. This match was fantastic. But this match was way too short. The show length was my only complaint. Just show hours with a 2:50 window. Boy did WCW try to rush these guys into having a sloppy show or what. Machine & Guerrero vs. Octagon & Santo was also tremendous. The heat and drama were terrific. Art Barr showed why he's the best or second best heel in the business. The high spots by all four were super. Worst match was Konnan vs. Aguayo only because the in-ring work couldn't hold a candle to the workrate of the other matches. As it was, it was one of the fifth best PPV matches of 1994. I didn't think anyone could bleed like Hase or Muto.

Chris Kazmerzak

Columbus, Ohio

Thumbs in the middle. Nothing spectacular. Just an okay card. This was the first time I saw a Lucha Libre show so maybe my expectations were too high. I thought the half-hour countdown show would be an excellent aid in informing viewers on the make-up of the show. However, it started with audio only and lost that. If it wasn't for your 11/7 issue, I wouldn't have had a clue what was going on. The strong

points were the announcing of Tenay and Cruise and having Chris Benoit work the show. The bad points were the mandatory plugs for WCW shows which stood out like a sore thumb. The worst thing was when Cruise plugged the Clash by cutting off Tenay giving important information. It seemed the first three matches went to the finish too quickly. The first match was detracted by the referee taking forever to count the pin. I don't see how Rey Misterio Jr. will last very long if he keeps getting thrown into the fourth row. La Parka highlighted the third match since Benoit wasn't in the ring enough. The gaffe of the show was when Machine used the piledriver it was a threatened career ending injury. When Panther used the piledriver, Machine regained consciousness five minutes later. The head shaving should have taken place in the ring. I expected blood from Konnan vs. Aguayo. Little did I know what awaited. Aguayo looked like Wahoo McDaniel while Konnan reminded me of Warlord in more ways than one. The power behind both their blows were limp.

Steve Wacker

Lynwood, Illinois

The AAA PPV show restored my interest in wrestling. Major thumbs up. Best was the tag title match. Can't pick a worst match. While many things were missing that are normally seen on the AAA television show and it may have been a rushed card, it was world's better than any PPV show in the United States this year. While some may criticize Aguayo vs. Konnan as compared with wrestlers like Rey Misterio Jr., the crowd tension was so strong it could be felt even over the television screen. After seeing Machine & Guerrero vs. Santo & Octagon, it's easy to see why other promotions are going to be trying to suppress AAA from gaining a foothold in the U.S.

I'm glad there are companies like AAA, ECW and SMW who aren't satisfied with delivering the same old thing. If one of these companies was exposed to a larger audience, it would make the big shots in Connecticut and Atlanta think twice about how bad their products have become.

Brian Bukantis

Fraser, Michigan

Thumbs up. This was a great card from start-to-finish. But it was also the shortest Lucha Libre big show in history. The other matches should have been 2/3 falls. Every match came off as rushed. These guys aren't used to working with time restraints. Despite that, everyone had their working shoes on, as usual. It was great to see Chris Benoit live, but his match was hampered because the crowd didn't care about the faces and because of all the problems Tito Santana had, and he was the only one on the team fluent in Spanish. At least Benoit and Scorpio have experience working the style. Despite the problems, this was better than 90% of the previous PPV wrestling cards. But what hack wrote the terrible entrance music. There was no excuse for not playing La Marcha Zacatecas (The March of Zacatecas, the home town of Perro Aguayo) for Aguayo. The cage match was certainly different than the previous cage matches on PPV this year. The outside interference actually added to the match, and it didn't turn into a circus like the Hogan-Flair match. After seeing what a big show should be like, I have no desire whatsoever to watch Survivor Series or Starrcade. What do they have to offer? Nothing new or innovative. Best match was Santo & Octagon vs. Guerrero & Machine, worst was Team IWC vs. Team AAA.

Fredrico Garcia Jr.

Hawthorne, California

The weekend of 11/5-6 was one of the most exciting wrestling weekends for me in a long time. First I attended the ECW show and it was great. What an atmosphere. When Sabu landed on his head everyone cringed and thought he broke his neck. ECW did a tremendous job of improvising during the legit injury.

This was also the first time I saw AAA and was very impressed. If promoted in a proper manner it will become very popular in the United States. One of the reasons the show was great was the outstanding announcing by Chris Cruise and Mike Tenay. They made me feel as if I had been an AAA fan from the beginning of the promotion. Their backgrounds on the wrestlers were very thorough. The crowd was really enthusiastic throughout the show.

Jammie Ward

Clifton Heights, Pennsylvania

When Worlds Collide was simply the best PPV ever. Ultimate Fights may be real, but the matches are over too soon. UWFI has better basic wrestling, but there is nothing spectacular to hook you. AAA means Action, Action, Action.

There was no worst match. The third match was the least good match of the bunch, but La Parka was a great show all by himself. The cage match was everything a cage match should be. I had never cared for Perro Aguayo before, but this match had me into it. Can you increase the rating system to six stars? If not, you can't do justice to Santo & Octagon vs. Machine & Guerrero. The second fall had me wondering if they were actually going to unmask. I do have a small complaint. The announcers needed to explain the piledriver's devastating effect better. They could have pointed out that the Mexican rings are harder and done replays to show the difference in Octagon getting the devastating tombstone piledriver while Love Machine only received the regular piledriver. But overall the announcing by Chris Cruise and Mike Tenay was great. You could tell they enjoyed what they were seeing. That gave out tons of info. And when was the last time you heard announcers telling us how old the participant in the main event was? My only concerns, other than if we'll see more AAA PPV shows, is if Cruise will still have a job in WCW after they saw how good he could be and how he put over AAA. Thanks guys. This tape is a keeper. But don't ever call it "Mexican wrestling" again. Call it the best wrestling in America.

James Hold

Houston, Texas

NOVEMBER 28, 1994

*"God made the devil just for fun*

*When he wanted the real thing he made Aja Kong"*

--Chorus of an English language song in Japan that has become Aja Kong's entrance music

TOKYO -- At 11:56 p.m. on Sunday night, Akira Hokuto, the greatest woman wrestler who ever lived, left the ring at the Tokyo Dome, her face covered with both sweat and tears, and collapsed in the locker room amidst a hoard of reporters asking her about her future.

It will no doubt be remembered as the pinnacle moment of not only her career, but that of her sport. Five years earlier, it looked like that sport had its last big hurrah, its first and what figured to be its last \$500,000 house--"The day the music died," so to speak at the Yokohama Arena, signifying the retirement of its most popular performer ever, Chigusa Nagayo. Soon after it lost its weekly Saturday afternoon television time slot. It was relegated to a monthly slot in the middle of the night, and with no charismatic superstars left, the teenage girls that were the fan base grew up and left pro wrestling behind. But it was a temporary lull, re-emerging just two years later with a new appeal, with new stars and with an entirely new audience demographic that would have never considered watching it before. They would have dismissed it, despite the quality of the matches being the best anywhere, as entertainment aimed at schoolgirls, which it was. But when it re-emerged, it built to a level larger than anyone's imaginations at the time could have ever conceived of.

The moment ended a day that began ten hours earlier when a 60-piece marching band led a parade of more than five-dozen wrestlers representing 11 different flag-carrying federations which looked like a scaled-down version of the Olympic games opening ceremonies. A day that can be best described by one word. Staggering.

"Big Egg Wrestling Universe," as the show was called, set a production standard for the industry that not only broke new ground, but in ten hours set the evolutionary clock of the industry ahead by ten years. It more closely resembled a Super Bowl than a Wrestlemania as an event.

The figures were more than just record-breaking, they were astounding. It was more than just the 42,500 fans, which more than doubled the all-time record for a woman's wrestling show that held up for 53 years (19,000 fans for a match between Mildred Burke and Elvira Snodgrass in 1941 in Louisville). There have been 12 crowds larger than that in Japan for men's wrestling just in the last five-and-a-half years. But what was astounding is the popularity potential of women's wrestling that this show uncovered. On April 2, 1993, All Japan women drew the first million dollar house in women's wrestling history for Dream Slam I at the Yokohama Arena, still probably the greatest pro wrestling show ever and at the time, the best series of interpromotional matches for drawing fans and believed to be just about the limit as to the best crowd the group would be capable of. Try \$4 million 19 months later, paced by about 6,000 fans paying the top ticket price of \$300 on the stadium floor. On April 2, 1993, the promotion did a staggering \$68,000 in program sales alone. Try \$612,000. Add what could have been close to if not exceeding another seven figures on other gimmick sales, throw in eventual commercial videotape revenue (between \$1 and \$2 million), network television rights and corporate sponsorship fees (in excess of \$1 million) and you're talking about when all is said and done, gross revenues that will end up in the \$8 million range. You're talking Wrestlemania gross revenue, but achieved without the most lucrative arm of the Wrestlemania revenue stream, the pay-per-view end.

Staggering described more than just the business aspect. To say the ring entrances were the most elaborate in the history of wrestling wouldn't begin to do the show justice. The wrestlers came out from a curtain on a sound stage in the baseball stadium outfield. The sound stage stretched nearly from foul pole to foul pole, blocking out some 14,000 outfield seats from being able to be sold. There were the usual explosive and pinwheel fireworks entrances. The last 13 matches had laser light show ring entrances, with the light show corresponding with the wrestlers' entrance music and light show in some cases making designs of the wrestler on the ceiling of the Dome. Wrestlers looked like they entered in cages and space ships from above (actually brought in by hidden lowered cranes from backstage but the visual effect with steam coming from the stage to the bottom of the entrance vehicle looked like ships levitating in mid-air), from underneath, in giant balloons, with acrobatic Ninjas and amidst a parade of Harleys. Approximately \$1.1 million was spent on special effects alone including a sound stage as impressive if not more than at the biggest rock & roll shows. Every match had its own corporate sponsor, who would then present a trophy and/or gift to the winner of the match.

And then there was the wrestling. This was not the greatest wrestling card of all-time, although it had to rank as among the best. But it was easily the best Tokyo Dome show ever. Ten hours and 23 matches are just too long even with some 40 topes and seven four-star matches. If scaled back to eight hours and if the four shoot matches and midgets were eliminated, and if the show ended with a more climactic last two matches, this could have been the greatest wrestling show ever. If any card could be called a slow builder, this was it. There really wasn't any major heat until the tenth match on the show when Shinobu Kandori and Toshiyo Yamada tore the house down. From that point things were off and running from 4:45 p.m. until 11 p.m. with one great match after another, with one 30 minute intermission at 6:30 p.m. and a second "opening ceremony," this time for the eight participants in the tournament only. Amazingly enough, there was still excellent heat nine hours in, up through the Aja Kong vs. Dynamite Kansai V<sub>8</sub> Top Woman tournament semifinal match, but the crowd got tired by 11 p.m. (the majority having been there from the start). Many kids, because of the curfew law (under 18 without parental accompaniment have to return home at 10:30 p.m.), people who came in from far away hoping to

catch the last train home, not expecting that an "afternoon" show would last until almost midnight, and those simply exhausted from the day or worried about getting up for work the next morning, started filing out early. There appeared to still be 35,000 in the building at 11:20 p.m. when the ring introductions for the final match began. So it'll have to settle for being the greatest wrestling spectacle.

Originally this show was to be Hokuto's retirement show, as throughout the year they had advertised the promotion's three biggest cards of the year (March at the Yokohama Arena, August at Budokan Hall and this show) would be the "Dangerous Queen final countdown." In the rough and dangerous world of Japanese women's wrestling, Hokuto was in many ways a symbol of the life-style of the participants and the promotion. Starting as a pro under her real name of Hisako Uno just before her 18th birthday, she was respected almost immediately as being a standout among the many good athletes in the promotion that entered the sport in the midst of the Crush Gals phenomenon. Even without a special look or gimmick, she teamed with Yumiko Hotta to win the WWWA world tag team titles from Leilani Kai & Judy Martin at the age of 19. But less than two weeks later, on April 27, 1987, it was over, not just the tag title reign, but apparently the career. She took a tombstone piledriver off the top rope for the second fall finish, the first and last time such a move has been done in the AJW ring, since it resulted in a broken neck. Even more than her ability, where she gained her reputation was in guts. The broken neck came during the finish of the second fall of that match. She got up, literally holding her head in place with her hands, and went through all her high spots, blocking out the pain, and worked the entire third fall. But it was about one year later before she could return to the ring, returning with bleached blond hair under the new character of Akira Hokuto, taking the first name of the most popular male wrestler in Japan at the time. Although she was quickly regarded as the best worker in the group, it wasn't until years later when the fans caught onto her, largely because of her frequent injuries resulting in ribs, shoulders, elbows and knees being taped in place, often at the same time. The "mummy" having incredible matches week-after-week tends to eventually get noticed. She broke her back before a major show, and was back in main events two weeks later. After a broken neck, everything else was child's play.

It was Dream Slam I and her match with Shinobu Kandori that established her as the group's biggest star in what was to be her final year of her career. While on tour in Mexico earlier that year, she got engaged and later in the year married to a Mexican wrestler who goes by the name Mascara Magica, and was moving there permanently at the end of 1983. But the Kandori match, which set so many records, also established her, when pushed in a key match, as the biggest drawing card in womens wrestling at the time, perhaps in its history, a status cultivated through the remainder of 1993 and through 1994. Over the past month or so, the promotion stopped all hype regarding the show being Hokuto's retirement match. She, under a mask as Reina Jubuki, had won the CMLL womens championship and it became well-known she was going to continue her career in Mexico, where some had labeled her the Michael Jordan of womens wrestling. It was announced after the show that Hokuto would return to Japan for one or two major matches in 1995, including a return fall engagement at the Dome.

Hokuto, 27, was presented as the show's star, winning the V<sub>8</sub> Top Woman tournament, the main draw of the card, and new title belt to represent the top champion of all womens world champions. Hokuto pinned long-time rival Kong in the finals. The way the publicity for the show was done and the way the crowd reacted, anyone else winning would have been both a surprise and a disappointment to the crowd. While all the major stars were "over" to a degree, she was clearly the star. While it was the pinnacle of Hokuto's career as far as being the key wrestler to draw the record house and being awarded a championship emblematic of her status as the best in the world, regardless of organization, there was disappointment in that it wasn't her finest hour in the ring. Saddled with the two weakest wrestlers in the tournament (LLPW's Eagle Sawai and FMW's Combat Toyoda) in her first two matches, and then with a tired crowd in a "story" match with Kong in the finals, her three bouts were the only tournament matches not to reach \*\*\*\*. The virtual consensus was the best match on the show was Kong's match with Manami Toyota in the tournament first round at \*\*\*\*\*, with another first round match of Yumiko Hotta vs.



Toyoda shocking everyone as its closest rival and Kong vs. Kansai third.

The match of U.S. significance was second from last, with Bull Nakano winning the WWF womens title from Alundra Blayze (also known in Japan as Madusa as all the women in their interviews were calling her by her old ring name). Coming on after 11 p.m. and following Kong-Kansai with the spent crowd was tough enough, but being asked to work American style so as to provide something different on the show made it even tougher. The Nakano-Blayze match was virtually identical to their regular WWF house show matches, which are usually one of the two best matches on most shows, but paled in this company. Nakano kicked out of Blayze's german suplex finisher and wound up winning with a legdrop off the top rope in 9:27. After the match Nakano told fans she was returning to the United States and would stay through September of 1995, and asked fans to remember her when she returned. In locker room interviews Nakano said she wanted to defend her title against Kyoko Inoue in Japan next year on a big show, most likely March 26 at Yokohama Arena, most likely one week before the expected title change back.

The card also featured a men's six man tag match with the stars of Michinoku Pro Wrestling doing their typical house show main event match; a "Miss Wrestling Universe" tag team match between four of the prettiest women in Japanese wrestling (one of whom, Takako Inoue, had a softcore-porn picture book released by the office earlier in the week selling like crazy at the souvenir stands hyped by some risque magazine shots in several different mags in the month leading up to the show); the debut of Blizzard Yuki (Sakie Hasegawa), a masked female martial artist as a cross-marketing gimmick of a character that will be released this coming week as a comic book figure that will also be part of computer games animation and perhaps as a television cartoon character; a legends tag match featuring Jaguar Yokota, the pioneer of this style of women's wrestling; and four shooting fights, two under amateur wrestling guidelines, one under shoot boxing rules and another under kick boxing rules. The opening ceremonies saw not only all the wrestlers on the card, but many not on the card dressed in matching sweat outfits with company and sponsor logos, mascots and flag carriers with the various promotional insignias coming out for All Japan Women's Pro Wrestling (AJW), JWP, LLPW, FMW, Gaea Japan, Michinoku Pro Wrestling, World Wrestling Federation, EMLL, Shoot Boxing, All Japan Female Wrestling Federation (amateur wrestling) and the Women's Amateur Wrestling Association from France.

1. Chapparita Asari (AJW) & Bomber Hikaru (Gaea) defeated Hiroumi Yago (JWP) & Hiroumi Sugo (JWP) in 6:53. Asari backflipped her way around the runaway coming to the ring. She was pretty much the highlight of this match, doing two of her backflips across the ring into mule kicks spot (kind of a backward version of Muto's handspring elbow). Highlight was the best gymnastic move of the show, leaping off the top turnbuckle to the floor as if doing an Orihara moonsault to the floor, but doing a full twist in mid-air before crashing onto her two foes. Asari pinned Sugo by coming off the top rope and turning around in mid-air and hitting her with a backwards dropkick. \*\*1/2

2. In a midget handicap match, Great Little Muta (Little Frankie doing the gimmick) & Buta Genjin (normally Little Buddha Man doing a Yone Genjin/Missing Link gimmick) defeated Tsunokake X in 4:44. Muta, who blew the mist at the bell, did comedy spots including being spun around like a top on his head and also a midget version of the handspring elbow. One comedy spot saw Genjin and Muta team together to do the Quebecers/Fantastics flip off top finisher but Genjin flipped Muta way short on purpose causing him to land on his head. Muta made Tsunokake submit to the STF. After the match the representative for the sponsor of the match, who looked quite a bit like Keiji Muto, came out wearing Muta face paint. 3/4\*

3. Candy Okutsu (JWP) retained the Japanese jr. championship beating Rie Tamada (AJW) in 8:52. Okutsu, who is only 18, is the best of younger wrestlers in Japan and is obviously a great athlete, but she lacks in height (5-0) which will forever be a handicap in reaching headliner status. At one point she ran across the ring, up the ropes and did a plancha to the floor all in one motion. Tamada came back with a plancha of her own off the top rope. They went back-and-forth with

near falls at the end with Okutsu pulling off some nice moves, finally winning with five german suplexes in a row. \*\*\*1/4

4. Suzuka Minami (AJW) pinned Kaoru (Gaea) in 9:35. Both women looked really good here with smooth spots and transitions back-and-forth. Minami hit a tope in the first minute. At another spot she was on the top rope and Kaoru slapped her so hard she fell to the floor and Kaoru came off the top with a plancha to the floor. Back in the ring Kaoru jumped to the top rope in the middle and did a springboard moonsault for a near fall but missed a second. Minami got near falls with two power bombs and they went back-and-forth with big moves and near falls. Finish saw Kaoru go for a moonsault but Minami got her knees up and Kaoru crashed, selling her stomach. Minami scored the pin with a power bomb. \*\*\*1/2

5. The first of four shoot matches saw Kumiko Maekawa (AJW) win a kick boxing match over Sugar Miyuki (an inexperienced female kick boxer) via decision after five two-minute rounds. Fans saw this as an intermission. Maekawa was clearly too strong and in too good a condition and won the decision easily. About the only thing of note during the match was that they used bathing-suit clad ring card girls and nobody whistles at them like they would in the U.S. It's unfair to rate shoots because you can't rate sport under entertainment guidelines.

6. A second shoot was a 4:00 one-round amateur wrestling match with Kyoko Hamaguchi, the 16-year-old child prodigy wrestler/bodybuilder and daughter of Animal Hamaguchi, facing Doris Blind of France, the world freestyle champion at 143 pounds. Blind, seven years older, won 5-1 but the match was competitive. It was really out-of-place to see real wrestling on pro wrestling shows. After the match Animal Hamaguchi, who comes off as the Little League father type role, told his daughter to do the crab pose with him to all four sides of the ring and to ask Blind for a return match next year at the Dome. The younger Hamaguchi has probably been pushed almost since birth into eventually becoming a pro wrestler.

7. Another 4:00 one-round amateur wrestling match saw Miyu Yamamoto of Japan defeat Ana Gomez of France 4-1. Yamamoto, who wrestles at 110 and won the world championships this year and has won the Japanese nationals the past three years, is considered the best female amateur in Japan and has something of a name because when she came out everyone in the crowd reacted pretty big to her. Gomez took second in the world meet at the same weight. It was easy to see why Yamamoto is considered the best amateur, regardless of weight because she had the quickness and skill of a lighter weight class NCAA champion male wrestler.

8. The final shoot match was under shootboxing rules, with Fumiko Ishimoto, who is the Shootboxing champion at 121 pounds beating Kaoru Ito (AJW) via decision after five 3:00 rounds. Shootboxing is a Japanese sport with both men and women where the participants wear gloves and it's a combination of kick boxing and Greco-Roman wrestling throws. After a throw, the combatants are brought back up to a standing position so they don't do any matwork or submissions. Ito looked to have a 15-20 pound weight advantage but her punches didn't have the sting of an experienced puncher. She was able to use her wrestling ability and strength advantage to get in a lot of throws, but the difference appeared to be her inexperience with gloves so she got tired faster. She lost via split decision. It was competitive, but I don't know which fight the judge that voted for Ito to win was watching. You have to respect the effort put in the previous four matches but it would have been better to limit it to one match of this type because four of them dragged badly on a pro wrestling show. This match was interesting because of the contrasting styles although it was really long, and the second amateur match was pretty entertaining but still too much.

9. Chigusa Nagayo (Gaea) pinned Reggie Bennett (AJW) in what was billed as "Big Heart Power match" in 8:39. It's amazing how someone who was as over as Nagayo once was, who literally parlayed her wrestling celebrityhood into hit records and even a movie and theater leads before returning to wrestling last year, could be so not over now. Nagayo got no pop coming out and flipped the crowd and Bennett off as she came to the ring. Apparently the new fans that embraced this

group or casually discovered it, largely male, see Nagayo as someone little girls used to like so they've never warmed up to her. She kept flipping Bennett off and challenging her on the ramp before Bennett ran up the ramp and brawled with her including hitting Nagayo with her hard hat and Nagayo juiced before the bell (only juice on the entire show). At the bell Nagayo hit a power bomb and Bennett rolled out of the ring. Nagayo then came off the top with a crossbody to the floor. There were a few girl fans reminiscent of days past shrieking "Chigusa, Chigusa" while waving the glow sticks that were a trademark of Korakuen Hall in the mid-80s. They just started to pick things up trading big moves when Nagayo schoolboyed Bennett for the pin. Finish was flat because it wasn't supposed to be the finish. Apparently Bennett was supposed to kick out but being deaf in one ear, the refs first hand slap on the mat was by her bad ear and she didn't hear it and the ref tried to hold up his third count and you can imagine how bad that looked, waiting for her to kick out and she was waiting for the two to kick out and the two had several more minutes of hot spots to go, which probably would have turned into a pretty good match since Bennett is a lot better than when she came as a regular to Japan. Nagayo was furious after the match and wouldn't even accept her trophy from the match sponsor. Apparently she was even more furious backstage. \*\*

10. Shinobu Kandori & Mikiko Futagami (both LLPW) defeated Toshiyo Yamada & Tomoko Watanabe (both AJW) in 11:30 in the match that began to turn the show completely around. Billed as the All Japan vs. LLPW Survival War, Yamada and Kandori were the story of the match and got great heat, both "picking on" the two weaker girls and building up heat for spots between the two of them with the crowd really into Kandori as much as almost anyone on the card because of her "tough" submission expert image. Watanabe did a crossbody off the top onto Kandori on the floor. Yamada tagged in against Futagami, put her out with a sleeper, dropped her and kicked her into the corner daring Kandori to tag in. They got huge pops trading submissions and Yamada using really stiff kicks including to the face. It was the first great match on the show, ending when Yamada came off the top rope but Kandori side-stepped her and caught her in the Fujiwara armbar for the submission, which got a big pop since everyone "knew" that Futagami and Watanabe were the ones in the match to do the job. Yamada and Kandori got into a pull-apart after the match and they built up great heat for an eventual singles match down the road between the two even with the clean submission finish. \*\*\*\*

11. Etsuko Mita & Mima Shimoda (both AJW) retained the UWA (Mexico City version) world tag team titles beating Yasha Kurenai & Michiko Nagashima (both LLPW) in 15:36. Mita & Shimoda were the first to come up to laser light shows. Mita & Shimoda are a great team but the LLPW girls weren't in their league so it held the match back as compared with their usual Korakuen Hall tag matches. Still, they did all their trademark spots including the Shimoda springboard plancha immediately followed by a Mita tope. Finish saw Mita got Kurenai on her shoulders in airplane spin position and drop her sideways onto her head like a piledriver--called the Death Valley driver, for the pin. \*\*\*1/2

12. The "Legends Memorial Fight" saw Jaguar Yokota & Bison Kimura go to a draw with Lioness Asuka & Yumi Ogura in a match of retired wrestlers. The match was supposed to have a 10:00 time limit but the Japanese, who are usually sticklers for accuracy of time, pretended time was short shading it the other way and giving them an extra minute. Yokota, 33, was the first of the Japanese women who was a better worker than the men. She debuted at 15, was world champion by 19 and retired as champion at 24 in late 1985 after a match with Asuka drew what was then the company's all-time record crowd of 13,000. It was at the time arguably the greatest match as well, years ahead of its time in style to the point nine years later it holds up better than other classics of the same year. Since retiring, Yokota has worked with the company as both head coach and color commentator. Kimura, 27, emerged along with Aja Kong as one of the cult heels that led to the new wave of popularity with wrestling fans in 1991. Asuka, 31, was Nagayo's partner in the legendary Crush Gals tag team in the mid-80s and later raced cars and did sportswriting and sportscasting. Ogura, 27, wasn't a star at the level of the other three although she did hold the tag team title. Yokota and Asuka opened doing the spots from right out of their famous 1985 match back-to-back. Yokota was amazing because she was every bit as good, if not better, than when she was active. Ogura looked better than I remembered her as well. This was

worked mid-80s Japan womens style and was an excellent match, even though it was held back by time constraints and lack of a finish. Apparently the plan is for Asuka to start her own promotion and have these three return next year as her top stars. \*\*\*3/4

13. Blizzard Yuki (AJW) pinned Mariko Yoshida (AJW) in 12:03. Yoshida came out in all things, a Jerry Lawler king robe and crown. Yuki had the most elaborate entrance of the show. Four gymnast Ninjas dressed up as Blizzard Yuki came out first, doing somersaults and backflips and martial arts poses. Then a cage with another Blizzard Yuki came down from the sky and about 15-18 feet above the floor, she jumped out although apparently it was a stuffed mannequin Blizzard Yuki. When it crashed onto the floor, fireworks exploded. At this point, the real Blizzard Yuki came from under the stage. Ironically even though this was an excellent match, it didn't accomplish its objective of getting Yuki over as a new super hero. Instead, it was Yoshida who got over big. At the 5:00 mark, Yoshida did a twisting crossbody off the middle rope to the floor, followed by a tope and a springboard plancha. Yuki came back with the best tope of the show, a Liger cannonball dive without holding onto the ropes on the way over and the tightest mid-air flip I've ever seen. They went to near falls and got great heat back-and-forth. Yuki did a turning somersault splash off the top rope for the pin. \*\*\*\*

14. The first match of the V<sub>8</sub> Top Woman tournament saw an "upset" (but not really) and shockingly awesome match as Combat Toyoda (FMW representative) pinned Yumiko Hotta (AJW Grand Prix first place finisher) in 16:55. FMW and Tarzan Goto are the hardest for AJW to deal with and to keep the relationship going they have to give up interpromotional jobs that they probably shouldn't if all was fair and based on who is over and ability, as this result was an example of. Toyoda had the match of her life. Awesome heat. Awesome match. Hotta kicked the hell out of Toyoda and threw moves on her that hadn't been invented like a cross-arm german superplex. With each near fall the heat grew. Hotta did an enzuigiri off the top rope a little low, but went back and hit the second perfect and started kicking the hell out of Toyoda's head until the ref pulled her back to make the ten count for the knockout but Toyoda got up at nine just barely. She started kicking the hell out of her again and the ref tried to drag her off and make the knockout count for another nine. Hotta went back to kicking and the ref and Hotta started struggling back and forth and while they were jawing, Toyoda came from behind with a german suplex for the pin--a 1990s version of the Harley Race-Dory Funk title change finish. All the women at ringside had to jump on Hotta to keep her from killing the ref. \*\*\*\*3/4

15. Hokuto (EMLL world champion) pinned Eagle Sawai (LLPW champion) in a tournament first round match in 11:08. Since nobody expected Sawai had a chance, she got the jump using a power bomb at the bell, bodyblocks, clotheslines and a throat drop. She dominated the first 5:00 until missing a splash. Hokuto came back including doing a Lizmark-style plancha to the floor. At one point Sawai, who weighs like 220, did a dropkick off the top rope that looked great. After near falls back-and-forth, Hokuto hit the Northern lights bomb but Sawai kicked out. As she went for a second, Sawai got a surprise cradle for a near fall. Hokuto then hit another Northern lights bomb for the pin. \*\*\*1/2

16. Kong (AJW WWWA world champion) pinned Manami Toyota (AJW IWA champion) in 17:19. Match of the year candidate. Toyota got battered and would come back with her flying moves. Among them were a reverse springboard crossbody. Kong threw some of the most brutal punches and kicks to the face and back. She did a twisting powerslam off the top rope and went to a crab but Toyota made the ropes. Kong picked Toyota up over her shoulder and ran across the ring and squashed her on the buckles. She picked her up again, carried her out of the ring onto the ramp, then did a windsprint on the ramp ending with a reverse powerslam on the ramp. After Toyota kicked out of a piledriver the place popped huge. She kicked out of a second piledriver and a backhand punch. Kong went to the top rope but Toyota got up and dropkicked her to the floor and hit a springboard plancha. Toyota then got on the top rope and did a dropkick off the top to the floor. She then grabbed a table and but Kong on it and slapped her silly. Toyota then ran across the ring and did a springboard into a splash onto Kong with both going through the table which drew the biggest pop thus far on the card. Toyota in the ring hit a moonsault for

a near fall, then an Ocean suplex for a near fall but Kong came back with a german suplex and power bomb for near falls. After a splash off the middle rope and another power bomb, Toyota kicked out twice more. Then came another move that I have never seen before. Kong was on the top rope backwards to do a falling elbow but Toyota scooped her legs. So Kong is sitting on the top turnbuckle backwards. Toyota went up and did a Frankenstein off the top rope somehow flipping Kong over backwards and landing on her in a Japanese rolling crotch cradle for a great near fall. Apparently she's done this before because the minute she set it up people were screaming "Backwards Frankentoyota" which must be the name of the move. Toyota went for another moonsault but Kong got her knees up. They went back-and-forth with more near falls until finally Kong used the SDD (vertical suplex dropped into a tombstone piledriver--Steiner Death Driver) and got the pin. Kong was in the ring crying from emotion and exhaustion after the match while Toyota was carried out of the ring. \*\*\*\*\*

17. Dynamite Kansai (JWP representative) pinned Kyoko Inoue (AJW) in 17:39 of a first round match. Inoue was originally going to have a mixed match with Lucia Rijker of Holland in a wrestler vs. kick boxer match. Apparently Rijker, who holds WKA, ISKA and IWBA world championships in kick boxing and is considered the best woman kick boxer in the world, first withdrew because this was going to be a work. This turned into a WCW-like situation. They announced she was trying to learn wrestling and sparring with Gracie submission students and one locked her ankle so she wouldn't be able to appear. About a week before show time, they put the deal back together as Rijker apparently agreed to work so they announced she was back in and the ankle had healed. It then fell apart again, I don't know for sure why but speculation is because Rijker didn't want to lose in a work so all of a sudden the ankle was bad again. It was all for the best as the day of the show they announced that Inoue would be put into the tournament for a first round match with Kansai, who originally had a bye. It was tough following the previous match but they more than did so. Inoue was great here doing all kinds of fast moves. Actually they went back-and-forth with great moves and super heat, and a lot of near submissions and rope breaks. They built the whole match up for Kansai going for her new winning move, "Die Hard," which is a Razor's Edge dropped into a power bomb while standing on the top rope, also called a Super Splash Mountain. When she finally got the move, she scored the pin. \*\*\*\*1/2

18. Megumi Kudo (FMW) & Hikari Fukuoka (JWP) defeated Cutie Suzuki (JWP) & Takako Inoue (AJW) in the Miss Wrestling Universe tag team match in 14:04. Inoue and Suzuki came out of giant balloons. This match had fast action and the moves were well executed, but after seeing the previous two brutal matches, people weren't up for pretty girls with pretty moves. Fukuoka did a crossbody off the top on Suzuki while Kudo tope'd Inoue at the start. Inoue later gave Kudo a tombstone piledriver on the ramp. They started slapping each other around which got the people into it and started hitting near falls. Suzuki did the Perro Aguayo double foot stomp on Kudo. Inoue did a choke slam off the top rope on Kudo and her knee to the back off the top finisher but Kudo kicked out. Kudo came back with a Frankenstein off the top on Inoue and did a chicken wing on Inoue who made ropes, then a Tiger suplex (underhook fullnelson into german suplex) for a near fall. Inoue came back again with her flying knee to the back finisher on Kudo but Fukuoka made the save. Kudo finally pinned Inoue after three power bombs. \*\*\*1/2

19. Great Sasuke & Sato & Shiryu beat Ginsei Shinzaki & Super Delfin & Gran Naniwa in 21:45. Before this match started, Yone Genjin, a Michinoku Pro wrestler who does a Missing Link gimmick, ran down the ramp with a dog collar around his neck being held on a chain by Monkey Magic with a comedy bit like the big strong dog running fast and dragging his master. Then the collar broke and he was running loose and Magic was going crazy trying to capture him. This was a Jap-lucha style match with one fast-moving high spot after another, looking really choreographed but with perfect timing since these guys work with each other every night. Match was great in most ways but a little too much comedy in some spots for my taste but the fans loved the package. Sasuke, who broke two bones in his foot three days earlier, was running around like he was a combination of Bart Connor and Carl Lewis. This was Shinzaki's (real name Kensuke Shinzaki) last match in Japan before starting with WWF at Survivor Series. Among the spots at the end were the faces doing triple huracanranas

(Frankensteiners). Then they did a spot with five straight dives. Shiryu ran across the ring, jumped on the middle rope, dove over the top rope onto the other side with a flip (Rey Misterio Jr. or Silver King move). Naniwa then did a plancha off the top. Sato then ran across the ring, climbed up the rope and came off with the flip plancha off the top all in one move. Delfin followed with a plancha off the top, Sasuke with An Asai-moonsault and Shinzaki came up last and did a Misterio twisting plancha. Delfin did his swinging DDT and Delfin clutch on Shiryu but Sato saved. Shiryu & Sato then did a double tope with a flip (Blackman move) on Delfin & Shinzaki, while in the ring Sasuke pinned Naniwa with a Niagara Driver. \*\*\*\*

20. Hokuto pinned Toyoda in 5:48 in the first semifinal match. Hokuto opened with a somersault into a koppo kick knocking Toyoda out of the ring where she did her flip dive hitting perfect. Toyoda came back with a backdrop driver for a near fall. Toyoda went up but Hokuto got up and gave her a Northern Lights superplex. Toyoda came back and threw a table into the ring and threw the table onto Hokuto's head. She put Hokuto on the table and came off the top with a splash but Hokuto moved. Toyoda shied away from the table when hitting so the spot looked messy. Hokuto then hit a Northern Lights bomb for the finish. \*\*\*1/4

21. Kong pinned Kansai in 12:24 of a brutal heated match. Kong hit a stiff backhand punch at the bell and hit a splash off the middle rope for a near fall. Kong picked her up and ran across the ring squashing her. She ran in for a second and was met with a stiff forearm. Kansai came off the top rope but Kong got her feet up. Kong hit three back suplexes in a row for near falls but missed an elbow. Kansai hit a clothesline and threw the stiff kicks. Kong was down for a nine count but got up. More kicks and another nine count but Kong barely got up. Finally Kansai hit the Splash Mountain or Niagara Driver or whatever you want to call it and Kong kicked out which got a huge pop. Kong out of nowhere hit the desperation backhand punch and Kansai was down for eight. Aja hit a second and Kansai was down for nine and just barely made it to her feet. Kansai made her comeback including a chicken wing german suplex for a near fall. Kong came back with a backhand punch and Northern Lights superplex for near falls, then an elbow drop off the top for a near fall. Kong then did the Perro Aguayo double foot stomp for a near fall. They wound up trading kicks and punches that saw the sweat fly off their faces everytime a blow landed until Kong hit the stiffest punch of the night and got a three. This was the first result that really shocked me since they had met twice before in singles matches and Kong had won both times so it looked to be Kansai's turn, but it didn't go that way. \*\*\*\*1/2

22. Nakano (AJW) pinned Blayze (WWF) in 9:27 to capture the WWF womens title. Blayze came out with 14 bikers on Harley's carrying a U.S. flag. They had a tough act to follow and it was after 11 p.m. and the previous match was just about all anyone could handle. They worked American style in an attempt to be different and it was good American style. Crowd was totally dead until the finish when Nakano won. There was no great crowd pop for the title change or post-match when Nakano was awarded the title. \*\*1/4

23. Hokuto pinned Kong in 20:24 to win the tournament. Kong came out in what visually looked like space ships with major fireworks displays and the most elaborate laser light show thus far. Hokuto came out with this robe with her mask and two little masked Hokuto's. They traded big moves from the start going out fast with near falls going back-and-forth and brutal kicks and submissions. Kong threw Hokuto over the top rope to the floor and went for a tope but Hokuto moved. Hokuto did another perfect flip dive onto Kong who sold the knee better than anything I've ever seen. There's a lot of background regarding this because in August of 1993, which was the last singles match between these two, it was Hokuto who came in with a blown out knee and could barely walk and ended up losing. Kong couldn't stand for a long time. It looked like they would stop the match but Kong begged for it to continue even though she couldn't stand. Finally she got the doctor to wrap up her knee right there and she limped back into the ring. Hokuto went after the knee with kicks and then a kneelock submission but Kong made the ropes. Then a scorpion but Kong made the ropes. Then a half crab and Kong made the ropes. Hokuto hit two Northern Lights bombs but Kong kicked out both times. Kong, who could barely stand, hit the backhand punch out of nowhere. She kept pounding on her own knee trying to knock it back in place. She went for a suplex but

the knee gave way and Hokuto got a near fall. After another backhand punch, Kong hit a Northern Lights bomb of her own and Hokuto barely kicked out. Aja then went to the middle rope and missed a splash and was literally crying in the ring from the pain. Hokuto did a back suplex for a near fall followed by a dropkick off the top rope. Hokuto came off the top again but Kong met her with a kick, but began selling the knee. Kong set her up for a superplex but Hokuto reversed it doing a choke slam from that position off the top, followed by a Northern Lights superplex. As Hokuto came off the ropes, she was met with a backhand punch and back suplex, followed by a second backhand punch. Kong put Hokuto on her shoulders for a Samoan drop but Hokuto went for a crucifix and Kong's knee went out at the same time. Hokuto got up and delivered three Northern Lights bombs in a row and scored the pin. This match because of the story would have been better than four stars almost anytime anyplace but at this point the crowd was so dead it fell short because of lack of crowd reaction to the "story." Both women cried on each others' shoulders after the match. Kong said that since she was pinned clean that she doesn't consider herself a world champion and took her WWWA belt and gave it up. Hokuto was presented with a new belt and addressed the crowd, which by this point was down around 20,000, pretty much saying that she'd come back from Mexico next year for the Dome show. \*\*\*3/4

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The long-talked about Philadelphia area wrestling war between Tod Gordon's ECW and Dennis Coraluzzo's NWA took place on 11/19 with both groups coming off with successful shows.

Coraluzzo announced an NWA tournament for Cherry Hill several months ago after Gordon and booker Paul E. Dangerously swerved him and the NWA board by holding a tournament and then having Shane Douglas win, and having Douglas reject the title saying the ECW title was the only title worth anything. It started a war of words between the sides that in some ways has reached silly proportions because they are fighting over nothing, but it does give the ECW hardcore fans another enemy promotion (as if they don't have enough already).

By most accounts, the 11/19 ECW show, which drew its largest crowd to date with 1,100 shoe-horned into the 850-seat building, was one of their best shows in a string of hot cards. The Steve Austin injury, which due to the timing of it and the hatred between most in WCW with ECW, caused an awful lot of skepticism within ECW, particularly when WCW tried to send Meng to ECW to take his place the day before the show. The only reason WCW was cooperating with ECW for this and only this show, sending Pillman, Sherri and Kevin Sullivan, was because it was an out of court settlement for WCW using the name "When Worlds Collide." The sides reached a compromise with Brian Pillman, who Dangerously had wanted from the start more than anyone in WCW except Austin and WCW had refused to allow him to use. Pillman & Douglas, managed by Sherri Martel, lost to Ron Simmons & Too Cold Scorpio in the main event when Simmons pinned Douglas after Sherri accidentally hit Douglas with her shoe. After the match Pillman took the sweater Sherri was wearing off and underneath she was wearing a Ric Flair t-shirt and Douglas after the match piledrove Sherri and called her a slut and made all his Ric Flair remarks.

Across the river in Cherry Hill, NJ, the NWA heavyweight tournament drew 625 fans with Chris Candido winning by pinning Tracy Smothers after hitting him in the head with a chain as Smothers went for a back suplex. Most reports are it was also a strong show, largely revolving around SMW talent, with only three weak matches out of 11. Security guards were wearing "ECW sux" t-shirts at this show, while at the ECW show, in the opener they had Steve Richards & J.T. Smith vs. Chad Austin & Hack Myers. Austin grabbed the house mic and said after the match he was going across the river to see some real wrestling so the other three all jumped him and beat him up. Nothing against Candido's work since he's one of the best new wrestlers in the business and will probably be among the elite workers in the United States within a short period of time, but having him as NWA champion at this point in time pretty well kills the title as far as being recognized anywhere as a legit world title. First off, his main job is working for SMW and unless they join the NWA and recognize Candido as champion, you'll have a world champion who isn't even recognized as such within his own promotion.

Candido isn't a national name like even a Terry Funk who at least could be booked most weekends on indies and at least give the impression he's a traveling champion to give the belt some credibility. Of the guys in the tournament, he was probably as good a choice as any, (Jerry Lawler has the national name but obviously wouldn't be a good choice as NWA champion right now) but the problem is they didn't have a current-day world champion reputation calibre wrestler in the field. Jim Crockett, who was not at the show but still calls his promotion NWA, won't recognize this title and there is talk he'll create his own title, although legally he won't have the right to call it NWA world heavyweight champion since the majority vote of the board picked Candido and the NWA title is a legally registered title controlled in the bylaws by the board.

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AAA became the second foreign promotion to run a tour of Japan this past week, playing to similar type results as the first foreign promotion to do so, the WWF, this past May.

As of Sunday, AAA had run four of its five shows, largely in small Southern Japan cities, drawing 1,500 to 2,200 fans on three of the shows and on its biggest show on 11/18 at the Hiroshima Green Arena, it drew 4,000 fans in an 8,000 seat building. The WWF shows in May drew slightly larger crowds, ranging from 2,500 to 4,500, but they ran in the four biggest markets in Japan while the AAA shows, in conjunction with New Japan ran almost exclusively in smaller markets with the exception of Hiroshima. WWF did far better in merchandise sales in Japan since AAA brought little merchandise over in a country where wrestling fans seem to have unlimited money for gimmicks. The AAA shows got over better than the WWF shows, but differing styles and education of the fans seemed to make it difficult for many of the AAA wrestlers who have more of a work rate ethic and seemed frustrated when some of what they did would get over, but other spots didn't.

Reports we received were that the first show, on 11/16 in Yashiro before 1,500 fans, was a very strong card even by the different Japanese standards. The second show, on 11/17 in Sasebo, wasn't as strong a card overall but the match with Wild Pegasus & Shinjiro Otani vs. Psicosis & Konnan was said to have been really good. The 11/19 show in Yamaguchi was said to have been a strong show.

The biggest show was a television taping for both New Japan television and also for AAA television in Mexico and the United States in Hiroshima. The show ranged from great high spots that the crowd liked, some unfamiliar spots that they didn't understand, and some messed spots because it appeared many of the AAA wrestlers were uncomfortable in the ring because their spots require that precision timing, some were really banged up and for some reason many had problems once up on the top rope. Due to injuries, the show wasn't as good as it would have appeared to have been on paper nor as good as most AAA house shows I've seen, but still was much better than most house shows in the U.S. In addition, even though both are "working" promotions when it comes to house shows, the styles are so different that New Japan and AAA might not be a smooth mix. The New Japan wrestlers are such good mat wrestlers and aren't huge, but are much bigger than the AAA wrestlers and the young guys are juiced up and look like powerhouses in comparison and work a realistic tight style. AAA relies on high spots and limited matwork, although some of the New Japan wrestlers on the tour, that have wrestled in Mexico before, can make the transition. There was probably the same internal problems with bringing this group in as there was with the WCW relationship. Riki Choshu, the New Japan booker, doesn't like foreigners to begin with which is why New Japan does little to develop new foreign stars, let alone small foreigners which most of these guys are. However Cat, who worked AAA most of this year, thought this style had potential and got them to do a separate tour but kept them out of the Tokyo area, where most of the hardcore fans that support the smaller groups and different styles live.

1. Tadao Yasuda made Tatsuhiro Takaiwa submit to the shoulder dislocating bearhug in 9:55. Yasuda is a huge ex-sumo but still very green. Takaiwa looks to have potential. \*1/4

2. El Samurai & Satoshi Kojima beat Manabu Nakanishi & Yuji Nagata in 14:50. Talk about juiced up and you're talking Nakanishi. Nakanishi will be a star some day because this is a group that loves to push guys that used to be on the Olympic team (Masa Saito, Choshu, Hase, Yatsu) and he has the look, and looked a lot better than when I've seen him on television. Nagata is very good and Kojima was the best of the four. Nakanishi relies on his power including using a swinging cobra hold (similar to Ken Patera's old swinging fullnelson) and suplexes people out of their boots. Samurai pinned Nagata with a power bomb. \*\*\*1/4

3. Wild Pegasus & Hiro Saito upset Akira Nogami & Takayuki Iizuka in 12:23. It was great when Pegasus was in since he was going 100 miles-an-hour with everything stiff. Saito was pretty much washed up and held the match back. Iizuka is a great athlete who lacks charisma while Nogami didn't do anything special. Finish saw Saito pin Iizuka with a senton off the top rope. \*\*\*

4. Mini Black Cat (Espectrito) & Jerrito Estrada beat Octagoncito & Mascarita Sagrada in 14:37 under Japanese rules. Octagoncito, who usually doesn't miss a move, was having footing problems with the mat and his knees seemed to be bothering him. The first 5:00 they tried to work Japanese style which all were inexperienced at. At about 5:30 they went into their own game and largely looked great. Octagoncito did the Asai-moonsault on Estrada. There were some missed spots and a spot where Octagoncito lost his shoe and they practically had to call time out to get it back on. Some spots got over as comedy that aren't comedy in Mexico. Finish saw Octagoncito do a second tope while Mascarita did a flip bodyblock off the top rope to the floor but had a hard time getting his footing on top which made the spot look really bad until the dive. Cat then made Sagrada submit. \*\*1/4

5. Black Cat & Black Tiger beat Psicosis & Mascara Sagrada in two straight falls. Psicosis, working as a face for the first time, looked great doing the face moves. They opened with simultaneous topes and Psicosis flying like a rocket far away from the ring. They tried to work New Japan style which was easy for Cat & Tiger but the other two never had. Cat gave Sagrada a back suplex which Sagrada took wrong and broke his collarbone badly and was screaming in pain. I've never seen anyone in wrestling legit scream in pain like this and he ended up running from the ring 3:00 in which pretty well screwed up the planned match. He was hospitalized and I believe he suffered a broken clavicle and will be out of action for some time. They did a great job in a way since Psicosis got over great as a face since he's so much lighter than the other two. Cat won the first fall pinning him in 6:19 after a DDT. Second fall had strong heat, particularly when Psicosis would make his desperation comebacks. Finally Guerrero pinned him with a swinging DDT. \*\*1/2

6. Gran Hamada & El Mexicano & Perro Aguayo beat Konnan El Barbaro & La Parka & Blue Panther in a one fall match announced as being under captains fall rules. This was a weird match in that everyone looked good but the match wasn't that heated although it would have been a four-star in the U.S. or Mexico. Parka's comedy got over, Panther's matwork was great but got little reaction, Hamada knows exactly what to do and works hard and Konnan just destroyed everything in his path working stiffer than I've ever seen him. Konnan pinned Mexicano with the Niagara driver making it 3-on-2. Aguayo pinned Parka with the double foot stomp but Aguayo had a lot of problems with the ropes. It heated up with all kinds of near falls and finally Hamada tope'd Konnan, and when he recovered from that, Aguayo tope'd him. In the ring Hamada and Panther went back and forth until Hamada did the Frankensteiner for the pin in 19:29. \*\*\*1/2

7. Norio Honaga won what was billed as the UWA junior heavyweight title from El Hijo del Santo, making him a double world champion with the IWGP belt. Why? The actual belt he won wasn't the junior heavyweight but the welterweight title Santo had won from Karloff Lagarde Jr. earlier this year. Match was totally scientific for the first half. Santo does the pretty moves that get over in Mexico when you do matwork, but in Japan they look for stiff believable submissions so some worked and some didn't. It picked up in the second half. Santo did a great tope and put on the camel clutch but Honaga made the ropes. Honaga then did a tope threw the ropes and hit a clothesline and in taking the bump, Santo did something to his shoulder pretty

serious. He was working the next day but he couldn't lift his arm. Perro Aguayo kept spraying deep freeze on him and Aguayo and Hiro Saito went at it at ringside to distract from the fact Santo was hurting so bad. But typical Mexican wrestler, the next thing he did was a dropkick in the ring and a Santo dive out of it. When they got back in, Honaga threw some flying clotheslines and a german suplex for a near fall. Santo reversed Honaga's second german suplex try and was in position for one of his own when Honaga kicked him low. Honaga then delivered an elbow off the top rope for a pin in 19:59. \*\*\*1/4

8. Shinjiro Otani made Great Sasuke submit to an ankle lock in 15:10. Sasuke had broken his foot in two places the day before and could not walk, but through psychology these two still had a great match. Sasuke still did a backflip off the top rope landing on his feet and gutted out a few high spots. Otani did a great springboard plancha and Sasuke insanely still did an Asai-moonsault and got a near fall with a cross-arm german suplex. Both men then did dropkicks and rolling savate's simultaneously. Sasuke got a few more falls before Otani gave him a quick dropkick to the ankle and put the lock on. \*\*\*3/4

DECEMBER 5, 1994

### "Love Machine" Art Barr found dead at home

#### WHEN YOU LOSE A BROTHER

*Trying to forget the news*

*That you're gone so soon*

*It leaves me crushed and broken*

*So sad, I don't know what to do*

*A brother is more than blood*

*More than just a name*

*Even though we have different families*

*We were brothers just the same*

*We weren't brothers in flesh and blood*

*We were brothers of circumstance*

*Sharing stories and good times*

*Sharing the same visions and dreams*

*I remember so many times*

*When each other was all we had*

*Helping to conquer the difficulties*

*Of being two strangers in a strange land*

*Yet I'm very thankful*

*At the end of that one day*

*When we exchanged the words "I love you"*

*As only true brothers can say*

*Because even though you have gone*

*To a place we all shall see*

*We shared respect, love, admiration and fun*

*And you will always be with me*

--Chris "Lion Heart" Jericho

Thanksgiving 1994, Mexico City

Sometimes life isn't exactly how it seems. In the case of Love Machine, to the very end, life never turned out to be the way it seemed.

Machine, who came into his own as the best heel in pro wrestling over the past few months, passed away, apparently in his sleep, on 11/23, the day before Thanksgiving, at his home in the Eugene, OR suburb of Springfield. Results of the autopsy couldn't determine a cause of death. In 28 years, his life took many unpredictable twists and turns. He was like a top spinning around with endless energy and enthusiasm. But like a top, he was never in control of his own destiny. Some outside force always took over and made the direction of his life exactly what it didn't appear to be.

Art Barr, after getting his Monday paycheck, flew back from Mexico City on Tuesday to pick up his five-year-old son Dexter who spent the weekend with his mother, Gloria Abston. The next day his mother tried to call him throughout the day. When there was continually no answer, she drove to the house. Between 4 and 5 p.m. she knocked on the door and again there was no answer. She went over to the bedroom window and saw Art and Dexter both asleep on his waterbed. She pounded on the window, waking Dexter up, who let her in. She noticed he was cold and clammy, and there was blood coming out of his nose. When she couldn't get Art awoken, she went next door to the neighbors and called 9-1-1. When medical help arrived, they pronounced him dead, believing he had been dead anywhere from six to 24 hours.

Lane County coroner Frank Ratty couldn't determine a cause of death after an autopsy that wasn't completed until the following Monday. Although it was heavily reported in the Mexican and Spanish language media the day after his death that the cause was a brain aneurism, one of several first-day theories, the autopsy ruled that out. Also ruled out was any foul play, a ring injury or lingering effects from an injury, as there was no trauma to the body or internal organs. There was no heart attack, no organ damage or problems, no internal bleeding, no stroke, no cancer and nothing else visually obvious. He had taken sleeping pills the night before to get to sleep, Halcyons, perhaps Valium, although Ratty wasn't even hinting at an overdose.

Coverage of the death symbolized in many ways the cultural barriers not only between the United States and Mexico, but between Americans who speak Spanish and English as their primary language. The death received prominent coverage throughout Mexico on the country's 24-hour news station, with a feature running regularly throughout the day. It was a major story on the network evening news and on every 10 p.m. newscast in Mexico City and was covered on page 10 of the front section of the Mexico City equivalent of the New York Times. Within the United States, it received a surprising amount of coverage on many Spanish language newscasts within California and on Spanish cable, including a four minute feature on the Galavision news with Arturo Rivera. There was no English language coverage, except in his home town of Portland, OR where he had achieved some infamy for a criminal past. Even to his death, he remained a political hot potato at The Oregonian, the local newspaper, to the point where it would be impossible to write anything positive about him in the newspaper, even about his wrestling career, and even in death. Indeed, in his obit, his entire career, details of which were known, was summed up in two sentences, "Following the (sexual assault) incident, Barr signed on with Ted Turner's World Championship Wrestling in Atlanta. Arthur Barr's father is Sandy Barr, a widely known Portland professional wrestler and promoter."

"He was very high on life," said Carlos "Konnan" Espada, who met him in WCW in late 1990 and opened the door for him to come to Mexico with EMLL the next year, and had come to refer to him in recent months as "our Ric Flair." . . "He had been given a second opportunity in wrestling and had made the most of it. He just came off a five-star match on a pay-per-view and hadn't even hit his potential."

"The loss is immeasurable, on both a personal and professional level," said Ron Skoler, who heads IWC, which promoted AAA events in the United States. "I could only give him the highest praise. He had taken great strides to get his personal life in order and had his professional life in order."

I think he was going to be the Roddy Piper of the 90s. A Roddy Piper who was a great worker."

His father, not surprisingly, canceled his Thanksgiving night show. In Mexico City, at the AAA office, the tears didn't stop flowing all day. Two nights later, in Compton, CA, a distraught Rey Misterio and Rey Misterio Jr. led a moving prayer and a ten bell salute in the middle of a wrestling ring. Later that night, Stan Stasiak and Tito Carreon hosted the local wrestling show in Portland, devoting the entire hour to him, talking about his death, the early part of his career, and aired the incident where Roddy Piper gave him his first gimmick and three of his matches.

Art Barr, in his all-too-short life, started as the son of a wrestler and became a too-small prelim wrestler, a top local cartoon character babyface, a prelim wrestler with a national promotion, a guy who disappeared in his country only to become a headliner and set attendance records for two of the biggest and best drawing promotions in the world, the best heel in the business and a person who changed the style of wrestling, blending the best the styles from Mexico, the United States and Japan all have to offer into almost a futuristic international melting pot of a style. In what turned out to be the last match and quite possibly the best match of his life, he appeared on the biggest wrestling event ever in his home country produced by a foreign-based promotion. But not only was he "Love Machine" and "The Juicer," he became known as something else. He was called the rapist, and names even worse. He became the cause of celebrity in his hometown for too-lenient sentencing. Others close to the situation believed he became a political pawn in a feud involving a local athletic commissioner, a newspaper and with two wrestling promotions who just didn't comprehend the situation.

Love Machine was the son of former prelim wrestler Ferrin "Dandy Sandy" Barr, who actually became a better-known figure around his home town of Portland, OR for his two decades of service as the striped-shirted expressionless referee every Saturday night on "Portland Wrestling" a local institution on Ch. 12. Art practically grew up in the Portland Sports Arena, the 2,000-seat converted bowling alley that ran wrestling every Saturday night, once a month for "Tuesday specials," which his father helped Don Owen promote, and where his father ran the weekly Sunday afternoon flea market. From the age of eight, the Sports Arena was practically his playground. He grew up amidst the wrestling fans, the arena rats, and the local television wrestlers, the most famous of which was his hero, Roddy Piper. Piper, the local drawing card unparalleled spent several years in Oregon, where he ended up making his home, at the time when it was thought by narrow-minded promoters in larger and more lucrative territories he, at 210 pounds, was too small to ever make it big.

There were countless others he met as a teenager from future national superstars like Adrian Adonis, Curt Hennig and Jimmy Snuka; to local legends who never really made it outside Oregon like "Playboy" Buddy Rose and Rip "The Crippler" Oliver, to "can't miss" prospects who never quite got there like Ron Starr, Billy Jack Haynes and Tom Zenk to those whom tragedy struck at an early age, like Lonnie "Moondog" Mayne and a wrestler whose incredible wrestling talents were no match for his even more incredible propensity for self destruction, "Mad Dog" Buzz Sawyer. There were others that Barr saw at the Sports Arena who achieved the same early end but whose exploits had been all but forgotten like Steve Schumann.

He was taught to wrestle by his father and, like his older brother Ferrin Jr. (Jesse Barr) and Matt Osborne, started wrestling as a babyface among the fans who had seen him grow up every Saturday night. He was not only taught wrestling, but the ways of wrestling, its psychology, the constant conning, or working as it was known in the trade, the drugs and the easy and available sex. Before even starting as a wrestler, as an 18-year-old, he had a cocaine possession conviction on his record.

Just a few years out of high school, Art, despite his limited size, got his start in his father and brother's profession on April 2, 1987 in Salem, OR. At 175 pounds, he was a good worker almost from the start but was too small to be taken as a serious wrestler even in a territory that didn't revolve around steroids and humongous size as did most of the profession at that time. He seemed destined to be a good worker who probably would become a preliminary fixture on the local circuit, like his father was in the 60s and early 70s, only faster and more agile, but never go anywhere else. He'd work the 20 and 30 minute preliminary matches against other young men breaking in or past their prime veterans either looking to go somewhere or to hang on. Perhaps he'd on occasion become the foil of an angle either to bring his big brother, who at the time was thought to have potential to make it as a national star, into the mix as a big brother/little brother tag team, or even for the annual angle to lure his father out of retirement.

It was Piper, Barr's mentor in wrestling, who came up with his first career break. Piper himself would hang around the Sports Arena and throw in booking ideas while he was on his frequent WWF hiatuses and retirements, got an idea. On January 21, 1989, Piper told Barr to take his standard ring gear off, changed him into raggedy clothes, put white make-up on his face, flour in his hair, and named him "Beetlejuice," after the lead character of a hit movie and later a children's cartoon series of the same name. As the ultimate cartoon character in probably the most traditional-style wrestling company in existence, "Beetlejuice" became the most popular wrestler in the promotion. He would come out to entrance music and lead a procession of kids ranging from tiny children to young teenagers, many dressed up just like him, like a Pied Piper, dancing to the ring. There, by far the smallest wrestler in the promotion, dressed like a cartoon with the flour in his hair that he'd shake and get all over the ring when he'd make his comeback, generally vanquished the bad guys, in particular a crotchety past-his-prime wrestler named Al Madril who proclaimed each week how he hated kids.

Six months later, on July 16, 1989, came an incident that would forever change his life and which, within the city he grew up and in the profession he worked, he would seemingly forever be associated with. After a show in Pendleton, OR, Barr was with a 19-year-old wrestling fan named Angela. In the deserted armory, late at night, underneath a stairwell, a sexual encounter, took place. Barr was charged with first degree rape. Since Barr had been dancing with young children like a Pied Piper on Saturday night television, and his father a fixture on the show first as a wrestler and then as a ref for some 25 years, this turned into more than a rape case. Don Owen and Sandy Barr, who were running the company, seemed to have no understanding what a powder keg they were playing with. Even after the incident hit the local newspaper, The Oregonian, Beetlejuice came out the following Saturday, and every Saturday after that, and did his thing, wrestling as is often is the case, being oblivious to the outside world, which often leads to problems. This caused a political tremor. Several reporters sympathetic to the victim and to the nature of the crime were appalled by this accused rapist dancing with young children and being portrayed as a hero, and for the most part, seeing the fans, particularly the kids, buy it week-after-week. The most sizzling newspaper copy probably ever written in the city followed, over-and-over, most notably by columnist Margie Boule. It never let up. The promotion continued to feature his character, but started hedging its bets a little before his trial was scheduled to begin, by creating a second "Juicer," the hilariously named "Big Juicer," (Jeff Warner who later worked briefly for WCW as J.W. Storm), and the two held the tag team titles twice in early 1990. Boule, and much of the Portland community, got more appalled as Barr was mobbed by children on television every Saturday night as his case was growing near.

But that was only the beginning of what would happen. In July of 1990, the day his trial was to begin, Barr plea-bargained the first degree rape

charge down to a first degree sexual abuse charge and was ordered to pay a \$1,000 fine, pay for all the victim's medical and counseling bills, sentenced to 180 hours of community service work and placed on two years probation. Barr, who, perhaps because of the environment he had grown up in and lived with the easy access to more-than-willing female fans hanging around the back of the Sports Arena, or the exact details of the situation and how it related to that, never accepted he was guilty despite the plea. During the police investigation, while taking a lie detector test, Barr admitted having sex with the girl and that he had known at the time she didn't want to have sex with him on a stairway in an empty armory, but he believed she'd have been willing to have sex with him somewhere else. The girl testified differently, that she never was willing and that she asked him to leave her alone numerous times that night. Still, Barr always claimed he could have beaten the case in court but was advised against it since he was offered no jail time to cop the plea. By accepting the plea-bargain he was advised it would end all the pressure on him, he wouldn't be risking a prison term if he went to court and lost, and the negative publicity pressure mounting against his wrestling locally would die out. Since he was married with two very young children, it was imperative he was able to maintain his livelihood.

As was the case with almost everything about his career, it turned out exactly the opposite as it seemed. The outcry only got worse, with Barr being portrayed as a celebrity example of a justice system gone awry. As the columnists raged, here was a television personality who admitted having sex with a woman without her consent in the back of a deserted armory, and didn't spend a minute in prison for it. The outcry from the guilty plea bargain with no time in prison was so strong the promotion finally decided to temporarily stop using him until the heat died down. But once again, nothing was as it seemed.

At an Oregon boxing and wrestling commission meeting on August 15, 1990, the subject of Barr came up. When there was talk of revoking Barr's wrestling license based on the guilty plea, legal counsel said it would be a very sticky legal situation even though there was media pressure on the commission to keep him from wrestling, which some believe was indirectly fueled by commissioner Bruce Anderson himself. Anderson seemed to always be involved in one controversy after another with Owen and Sandy Barr, who, despite the laws on the subject, never accepted that Anderson had the power to regulate their industry, a power he used more zealously than any other commissioner in the country. Art was one of their top faces. But it came up at that meeting that a loophole was found. When Barr had filled out his license earlier, there was a question, Had he ever been convicted of a felony? Barr answered that he hadn't, ignoring the possession charge as a teenager. Since he had lied on his license application, it gave them the legal grounds to deny him a future license, and at the meeting it was made clear there would no chance his license would be renewed even after the newspaper heat died down.

What this looked to have meant was a forced long-term hiatus from wrestling. Nobody ever believed, because of his size, especially in that time period, that he had any potential outside his home territory because of what pro wrestling had become. But as it always did, it turned out just the opposite. As fate would have it, it was part of a series of events that culminated in his earning more money from wrestling than he would have ever believed possible as a kid watching the matches in the Sports Arena. More money than practically anyone in the business who saw him at that time would believe he had the potential for.

Somehow World Championship Wrestling, which at the time was still dueling the World Wrestling Federation fairly equally in adult viewers but was getting destroyed in the young children demographics, was desperate at the time to develop a character that would get children to watch on television and go to the matches. Somehow a tape of Barr as "Beetlejuice," surrounded by dancing children, wound up being shown to Jim Herd, who decided this was what the company needed, against the wishes of booker Ole Anderson, who naturally cited he was "too small" to be a wrestler. Barr later after making it big liked to joke he was the same size as Anderson, only he wasn't fat. Despite the fact Barr's legal situation was well covered not only within wrestling publications, but had become a huge mainstream media story in his hometown, somehow Herd, Anderson and company, as with many



situations in that time period, were either oblivious or ignored this powder keg waiting to explode.

Barr debuted as "The Juicer," with WCW. It was the same gimmick that got him over in Portland with the minor name change to protect WCW against possible licensing infringement which promoters in Oregon never even considered. The Juicer was an opening match wrestler given an opening match push. But once again he got surprisingly strong crowd reactions. And once again life for Art Barr wasn't what it seemed. Since he was getting a small television push, with the same kids hero character, the word got back to Portland, particularly, The Oregonian and Boule. Another blistering column aimed at Turner Broadcasting followed. It was followed by a letter from the publisher of the newspaper to Turner himself imploring him to exercise better judgement. At the same time another source, nobody knows who except it came from a Northeast area code, began faxing Boule's columns and Barr's other press from Oregon to local newspapers in cities Barr was about to appear in letting them know WCW was portraying this individual as a kids hero. Herd initially responded by saying he was 100% backing Barr and keeping his commitment, saying he'd paid his debt to society as the Oregon judiciary decreed and it wasn't up to wrestling to continue to punish him. Items appeared in a paper or two, and at least in one case it was independent of the faxing brigade, which led to crowd chants of "rapist" at the babyface. Herd backed off his original statement and finally agreed to continue using Barr through his already planned bookings but not book him any farther.

Surely that was it for pro wrestling, at least for the foreseeable future. He couldn't even leave Oregon and leave his past behind him. But once again, things weren't as they seemed. In the latter days of his WCW stay, WCW brought Konnan in from Southern California, largely because Herd wanted a real Mexican tag team in a Pat O'Connor International tag team tournament he was promoting as part of Starrcade '90 in St. Louis. During his week or two with WCW, Konnan became friends with Barr, who at the time even though the decision had already been made, wasn't told by anyone that his days were numbered.

After returning to Mexico, Konnan talked EMLL promoter Paco Alonso into giving good money deals to two wrestlers he met while in WCW that he thought had potential, Norman Smiley (Black Magic), as a heel, and The Juicer, as a babyface.

Love Machine, a masked American, was born in March 1991, at a time when the wrestling business had caught fire due to the introduction of televised matches to Mexico City. Whether the name was a final slap in the face at the Portland media since he maintained to the end that the newspaper, Bruce Anderson and the victim had railroaded him, a viewpoint that was controversial to say the least, or it was just coincidental, isn't known. When word got back to Portland, it was taken that way. More press followed, about the sick irony of Art Barr wrestling under a mask in Mexico, using all names, Love Machine. But pressure couldn't cross the border this time. With no prejudicial notions about size in Mexico where he was suddenly bigger and tougher than most of the wrestlers, and no media pressure, he could go as far as his ability would take him. That was pretty damn far.

It would be easy to say, based on the results in the ring, that his second lease on a wrestling career took him smoothly to the top. But it wouldn't be accurate. As a strong babyface, even though he was just one of many in the promotion at the time, money and business were great. EMLL, known by the boys simply as "The Empresa," ran more shows and drew more fans by far than any wrestling company in the world at the time. Love Machine was booked on as many as ten dates a week, frequently on weekends working a semifinal in one arena and driving two hours to another arena to work a main event on a show delayed until he and the other headliners doing double-shots, even sometimes triple-shots, would get there. Between his guarantee, and per-match bonuses for working the extra shots, he frequently earned in excess of \$3,500 a week. It would have been great, but nothing in his life was exactly how it seemed.

Since there was no time to go home with that kind of a schedule, he flew his family down to Mexico to live at the hotel. They hated it. They

wanted to go home and eventually they did. But with no potential job prospects at home, and more work than he could handle and the money flowing in Mexico, he had to stay and take quick trips home every few weeks. There were problems at times behind-the-scenes. One time in the office, Machine sucker-punched Blue Panther, who he was feuding with in the ring as well, in the face. At times the office was very worried about out-of-the-ring exploits and wild lifestyle, but bit its lip because Machine was very reliable when it came to business. He was one of the few foreigners who was adaptable to the style, and was turning into a leading drawing card.

It was the feud with Panther, the veteran heel with amazing popularity, that put Love Machine on the map as a genuine drawing card. They spent months building the feud, before setting up a mask vs. mask match at Arena Mexico.

On April 3, 1992, before one of the largest crowds in the history of the 40-year-old building, Blue Panther defeated Love Machine in a mask vs. mask match. Approximately 18,000 fans sold out the 17,100-seat building, selling out well in advance. Another 8,000 fans were in the parking lot watching the match on big screens set up to avoid the expected overflow trying to overpower arena security and storm the doors to get in. While there had been larger overflow crowds in the building itself, it was and still is the largest crowd to ever watch a match taking place live in the building.

One month later, Konnan, the wrestler who made the contact that brought him to Mexico, and Antonio Pena, the booker who gave him his chance, left "The Empresa" to form AAA with help of Televisa. Panther soon followed, leaving Machine without his leading rival.

Behind the scenes, Machine and Pena negotiated a three-year contract for an estimated \$3,500 per week (in 1994 it was renegotiated upward and extended for five more years, at approximately \$4,000 per week, making him one of the highest paid wrestlers in the country) to join AAA. His entrance to the promotion was symbolic of his exactly two years to the day tenure with AAA.

The main event on November 6, 1992 in Acapulco pitted Rey Misterio Jr. against Tony Arce of the Destructores in a mask vs. hair match with Rey Misterio under a mask and Panther as the respective seconds. Panther freely interfered in the third fall, until Misterio finally hit the ring, took off his shoes and removed his mask revealing Love Machine, his former rival. Machine chased Panther to the dressing room while Misterio Jr. clamped the abdominal stretch on Arce for the third fall submission. By the end of the year, Barr was finally licensed to wrestle in his native Oregon and returned for a Christmas night tag team tournament where he, called American Love Machine, and Konnan won the Pacific Northwest tag team titles at the Sports Arena. By this point, all the controversy from his past had died out, and there were no media outcries when he was licensed or when he came back as an international star, still as a babyface. The belts were taken to Mexico, where they became renamed the AAA world tag team titles.

The famous Juan de la Barrera sellout run (13 sellouts in 15 weeks), climaxed by TripleMania, followed, with Machine and Panther continuing to feud. The first major show after TripleMania was July 18, 1993 in Tonalá, Jalisco, a suburb of Guadalajara, headlined by Machine's hair vs. Panther's mask. It drew what was believed to have been the all-time record of 20,000 fans for the Guadalajara market. Panther began the match as a heel, although he always had his share of support. Machine as a face. Sometime in the third fall that changed. One look. One cocky smirk. One or two lifting up his beaten opponent at the count of two. That's all it took. No outrageous interview. No bizarre angle. Maybe in one minute, 90 seconds at the most, and everyone in the building caught on and not only did they react, they were infuriated. After six years of playing babyface, Love Machine had found his professional calling. While Machine lost that match via disqualification for using the dreaded tombstone piledriver, and had his head shaved while Panther went out on a stretcher, he had just found the key to real superstardom. One month later, Eddy Guerrero and El Hijo del Santo were partners in a trios match with Machine on the other team. Machine unmasked Santo, put the Santo mask on, and started beating up Guerrero. Guerrero then turned on the real Santo after

Machine gave him his mask back. The next week, Guerrero formed a team with Machine, and the Gringo Locos were born.

The Gringo Locos literally changed the style of Mexican wrestling. With Guerrero introducing more and more of the New Japan stiffer offensive style and suplexes, and Machine introducing American style heel big bumps in the ring, Ric Flair style chops, and combining it with the Mexican high spot style, and an incredible array of facial expressions, with the others younger wrestlers quickly emulating, they took Lucha Libre to the next level. The two almost immediately became the top tag team in Mexico. On August 27, 1993 in San Jose, CA, when Machine & Guerrero teamed up for the first time in the United States, it was obvious they were one of the two best, if not the top tag team in his native country as well.

At home in Oregon, he still had one last controversy up his sleeve. He was home on December 4, 1993, and showed up, unadvertised, unannounced and unlicensed (his previous license had expired and he hadn't had it renewed), at the Portland Sports Arena for perhaps the most bizarre match of his career against John Rambo. This show was sandwiched in between a Friday/Monday hearing with the commission regarding Sandy Barr's promotional license, and things didn't look good. Supposedly earlier that night, a drunk former area wrestler showed up saying he knew that Rambo was a stooge for commissioner Anderson. At one point, Machine threw a forearm to the bridge of Rambo's nose on what appeared to have been a double-cross on a spot that required extensive surgery and the doctor said was the worst broken nose he had ever seen in his life. Machine later said that forearm was an accident, and that Rambo had earlier in the match kicked him hard in the throat and Machine was, in fact, coughing up blood after the match. But the match at some point turned into a shoot with them not doing the planned finish. After it was over Sandy Barr grabbed the house mic and said that he had learned earlier that night that Rambo was a stooge to the commission, took off his shirt and told Rambo to get in the ring and take his whipping. Later that night backstage, Machine and Rambo got into it again and started fighting on the staircase before it was broken up. Anderson tried to get criminal charges of assault and battery pressed on behalf of Rambo, against Machine, but the police decided not to prosecute because of the belief that no jury would believe anything that went on during a pro wrestling match to be real.

In 1994, Machine, after turning heel on television about a week earlier for the first time in his home area, gained another round of local publicity and some national television and newspaper publicity in the United States. He was being managed by Tonya Harding in a match in Vancouver, WA. It was a combined show with AAA promoted by his father in grand spectacular fashion at a 12,000-seat outdoor stadium. The show, a major miscalculation since AAA had no television in the area, drew only a few hundred fans and turned out to be a major financial flop to the point it temporarily shut down his father's promotion. However, the scene of him throwing a cup of water in Konnan's face aired on newscasts around the country and on shows like Entertainment Tonight. He and Guerrero captured the AAA world tag team championship from Santo & Octagon on 7/23 in Chicago when the Gringo Locos paid off heel referee Tirantes in the ring, an angle which received much negative publicity in Mexican wrestling magazines for being just too silly. A few weeks later, Konnan turned heel and the threesome that looked to dominate AAA wrestling for years was on its way, a modern day version of the original Freebirds, with every bit the charisma and, with Guerrero, even more ring ability. The whole scenario was planned out. Some time, probably before TripleMania in 1996, Machine and Guerrero would finally turn on Konnan, leading to a singles match. Konnan and Machine had talked about building it to the point the match could be held at Azteca Stadium in Mexico City, which has a capacity of 130,000, and break the Hogan-Andre record. Whether that was a pipe dream or had a chance to be reality is something we'll never know.

"We'd have broken all existing house show records," said Konnan. "When Machine turned heel, it was like the first time you saw a Sabu or a Great Sasuke. He knew how to play to the (television) cameras better than anyone in our promotion. He knew how to play to the live crowd. I didn't know how to play to the cameras until I watched him. He'd look at the fans and blow (cigarette) smoke in their face when the camera went on (during his ring entrances)."

He also debuted for New Japan Pro Wrestling over the summer, under his original mask from Mexico, as American Machine. He generally teamed with Guerrero, as Black Tiger, and Black Cat, who he had frequently teamed with earlier in the year in AAA, as a mid-card tag team to work with Jushin Liger & Shinjiro Otani & Too Cold Scorpio. The original plan was for Liger and Machine to wrestle for the IWGP junior heavyweight belt in December, but Liger's broken ankle put that on hold. As it was, Machine was scheduled to return to Japan for the 1/4/95 Tokyo Dome show. He had mixed feelings about Japan, however. After his recent divorce, he had been given custody of his son, to the point that he cut down his bookings in Mexico and came home more frequently. Although he recognized the three-and-four week tours as being positives for his career, he wasn't in the position of needing any outside work. He had talked of wrestling until he finished up his AAA contract in 1999, having his house paid off, and coming off the road and talked of being a normal father. But with the exception of Shawn Michaels, there was no wrestler in the Western Hemisphere was that more of a certainty of being a major impact player for years to come, making the chances of him being able to walk away in five years exceedingly long.

Outside the ring, the year wasn't a run of four-star matches every week. His marriage, which survived the pressures of the publicity from the rape charge, the job changes, the wrestling lifestyle and the phone calls from a Mexico hotel rooms, finally unraveled. Even though he wasn't home much and the negative publicity had disappeared after the column or two concerning the Rambo incident, the pressure of it never ended on him mentally. He talked before the summer of his impending ten-year high school reunion, wondering what all his friends he'd grown up with would think of him after all they had read. He had a new fiancée, who took care of Dexter often while he went to Mexico, and who was expecting another child.

On 5/27, Love Machine was in a mid-card trios match at TripleMania II-C in Tijuana. The other principals in the match were largely forgettable but his performance won't be by any of the 18,000 in the bullring that night. From the moment he stuck his head through the curtain, he was 200% "on." He had the knack that exceedingly few wrestlers do, of making every single move, every single movement, every bump, somehow seem special and get a big reaction. Every bump was just a little different, just a tad more spectacular than the norm. His energy level was higher. His style was more complete. His frog splash was unique from any other leap off the top rope. From the opening strand of Van Halen's "Jump," as he came through the crowd, until the match and the post-match were over, he whipped the crowd into a frenzy. Even though the match was one fall, relatively short, and had a non-descript DQ finish, he had transferred his incredible energy to the crowd and left it buzzing. When the match ended, the crowd started doing a wave. A wave was all the rage a few years ago. From time-to-time waves have been done at major U.S. shows. Even more often in Japan, where people did them almost because on a big show the fans know at some point they were supposed to, almost like it's their duty. But this wasn't a wave because there were TV cameras there, or a wave to do a wave, like at the Wrestlemania in Toronto when fans did it while a match was actually going on, ignoring the match itself. This was a wave caused by one wrestler, who they all hated, but who gave them so much energy they couldn't sit still when it was over.

Love Machine's last match took place on 11/6 in Los Angeles, and stole the show on the "When Worlds Collide" PPV. While he was originally put on the card, the card was revamped and he was taken off. It took much lobbying from both himself and outside forces, along with agreeing to get his head shaved, to get the planned Santo vs. Guerrero singles mask vs. hair match turned into the double mask vs. double hair match on the PPV. It turned out to be one of the best matches of the year in the United States. He wanted to wrestle on the show. Badly enough to agree to lose his hair at something of a bargain base price (\$7,500 plus bonuses based on gate and buy rate). Make no mistake about it. He was well aware of just how good he had become, and that few outside Mexico knew it, and that this was his chance to show it. He was also aware that no matter what he did in Mexico, what crowds he drew, or even in the United States for that matter, it wouldn't be accepted or respected within the provincial American wrestling hierarchy unless people saw it with their own two eyes. There was nobody more focused on leaving no stone unturned and having the best match of his life and making sure that people

understood that he was what he thought he was. A few days before the match, he was so excited he just couldn't wait. This was going to be the hardest show in the country to steal, but he and Guerrero were stealing it. He'd planned and plotted for weeks on how.

A few weeks earlier in Japan, Chris Benoit & Shinjiro Otani screwed up a move they planned to debut as the finisher in the New Japan junior heavyweight tag team tournament, where Guerrero was on Pegasus' shoulders and Otani was to come off the top rope with a Frankensteiner. Otani couldn't maneuver his weight correctly in mid-air and the move didn't come off as planned. Machine & Guerrero decided they were going to debut the move on PPV. And get it right. Which they did.

Yet when it was over Machine was actually slightly disappointed. Maybe the letdown of when something you anticipate for so long actually takes place and is over leaves one with an empty feeling. Almost a perfectionist when it came to analyzing his own matches to begin with, he was almost never completely satisfied and always looking for ways to improve and experiment. He thought the first fall was too short and they rushed in other spots due to pressure on cutting the match down in time. When people who have never seen you, or haven't seen you in years and when they last did you were nothing but a prelim boy, read things like someone is the best heel in the world, in most cases the reaction is natural skepticism and readying to be disappointed. Nobody was. The scary part was, he had only been a heel for 15 months. And he was only going to get better.

People could no longer dismiss him because he was only 5-10 and 200 pounds, or because his fame was as an American-flag clad heel in Mexico, or because even in front of big crowds in the United States, it was only Mexicans that were watching and that because of that somehow none of that counted. And finally, within his profession, he had something in his present, and no longer his past, that he would be immediately associated with.

His reputation was made with an explanation point. Even if he were to never work for an American promotion, within his profession, he'd be known as a superstar commodity. His future in wrestling, finally, was guaranteed. But as with the rest of his life, for the final time, things weren't as they seemed.

Art Barr's funeral was scheduled for 11/30 at the Springfield Memorial Gardens and funeral home. His death may significantly impact the future course of both American and Mexican wrestling in ways few today actually understand and nobody will ever truly know. And even if that isn't the case, it leaves an emptiness. An emptiness in the entertainment week of the millions who didn't know him and hated him with a passion every Saturday night and Sunday morning on television. And a much greater emptiness to the few who did and didn't.

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Diesel (Kevin Nash) became the latest attempt to re-create a Hulk Hogan by capturing the WWF title from Bob Backlund in just eight seconds with a jackknife (power bomb) on 11/26 in Madison Square Garden. The title switch came just three days after Survivor Series, where Backlund had won the title from Bret Hart and Diesel had turned babyface on partner Shawn Michaels.

The quickie title change was largely given away to anyone who could read between the lines on television Saturday, both nationally and locally in the New York market. On the USA network's WWF Mania show, it was announced there would be a title match between Backlund and Diesel, replacing the "injured" Bret Hart, at the Garden and that the WWF would open its 900 number line for live commentary of the match starting at 9:30 p.m. Eastern time. In the New York market, the title change was telegraphed even deeper by announcing that the match was no DQ, no count out and no submissions, thereby rendering Backlund's chicken wing useless. Backlund also did an interview for the New York market complaining he had trained to wrestle Hart, not Diesel.

At the Garden before a crowd estimated at 7,300, announcer Howard Finkel made the announcement of the match but stated, in a tease, that it would be a non-title match, and then exuberantly corrected himself after a supposed change of plans given to him by agent Rene Goulet. Earlier in the show Backlund did a live interview to a chorus of heavy boos claiming he would be a much better moral leader than Hart, while fans chanted for both Hart and Diesel. The match itself was short, as it needed to be because of who was in there, with all the fireworks adding to the huge crowd reaction to the title change. Later in the show, Diesel came out to thank the fans amid another barrage of fireworks, and he was called the leader of the new generation on Monday Night Raw live on 11/28.

Nash, 35, billed at 7-0 (he was listed as 6-9 when he played basketball), is a Michigan native who played college basketball at Memphis State in the late 70s and played in European leagues for a few years in the early 80s. He started bodybuilding and was working as a bouncer at an Atlanta club where wrestlers and WCW management frequently hung out, and the huge bouncer caught the idea of several who talked him into trying wrestling. The plans were to give him major pushes due to his size from the beginning, but he flopped in his original roles of Master Blaster and Oz, and eventually became Vinnie Vegas as a tag team partner of Dallas Page, a character that was basically the prototype for his Diesel role. In 1993, over a contract dispute, he left WCW where he was going nowhere in prelims, to join WWF as Shawn Michaels' bodyguard. It was evident after getting over as a face by being portrayed as an unbeatable monster clearing the ring at the 1994 Royal Rumble, that his future was as a face and they teased the turn virtually the entire year, to the point where he was pretty much heavily cheered the past few months at most of the house shows despite playing a heel role.

Backlund, 45, who held the title twice between 1978 and 1983, got the honors of being the three-day transitional champion, and until Shawn Michaels recovers from his hand injury and can return to the ring and wrestle, will be the headliner who opposes Diesel on his first house show run.

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In the quiet manner which almost typified his career, Rick Steamboat (Richard Blood), certainly one of the top five wrestlers of the past two decades, came to the decision that his pro wrestling career has come to a close. Steamboat, 41, suffered a herniated and collapsed disc in his lower back which pressed on a nerve in his left leg, the most serious injury of his career, at the 8/24 Clash of the Champions in Cedar Rapids, IA during a match with Steve Austin. Although he worked on it for another week, the injury turned out to be the career-ender after 18 1/2 years. There had been a lot of talk dating back to September that Steamboat wouldn't be able to return from this injury, or if he did, it wouldn't be until the early part of 1995. He had originally wanted to wrestle through the end of 1995 to make it an even 20 years, but three doctors, all independent of one another, told him he had a 70% chance of rupturing the disc had he continued to wrestle, which would have required extensive surgery. WCW had also decided to not renew its option on his contract. As it was, the past eight weeks of three-hour-a-day rehab was one of the mentally toughest processes he's gone through. Steamboat was one of the most dedicated wrestlers in the profession to conditioning, to the point he had never gone longer than seven days over the past 20 years without training before the injury kept him out for 11 weeks. He also competed and won bodybuilding contests early in his wrestling career. He's just beginning to be allowed to lift very light weights in the gym and was told his days of lifting heavy, or doing moves that compress the lower back like squats and overhead presses, are over. Steamboat, who held the NWA world heavyweight title from February 20-May 7, 1989, winning and losing it in legendary matches with Ric Flair, also held the Intercontinental, U.S., and World tag team straps among a myriad of titles during a career that saw him considered one of the major stars in the profession from his second year in after scoring a television upset win over Flair. Flair, whose career may have ended less than two months later, will always go down as his most famous rival and visa versa. The two wrestled hundreds of times in the Carolinas dating from 1977 through the middle of 1994, matches that were considered the epitome of wrestling during most of that period, with numerous matches going 60:00. He also had a famous feud in 1987 with Randy

Savage, including a match at Wrestlemania III in Pontiac, MI which was considered the greatest match in modern WWF history for many years, probably until the Shawn Michaels/Razor Ramon ladder match this year.

Within the profession, Steamboat was right near the top of nearly everyone's list of the most respected individuals in the profession. Of all the major superstars in wrestling, he was clearly the most unselfish in the ring, always wanting to make his opponent look good and always allowing himself to not look as impressive so as to make the match more competitive looking. He was generally as willing as anyone in talking to and teaching younger wrestlers little tricks to get as much out of their matches as possible and to work babyface style.

Outside the ring, Steamboat was in many ways more the family man image that he often portrayed in the ring than most. He took hiatus' from the ring while at the top and would frequently make mention of his wife and married status during a time period when it was still considered a no-no for any top babyface to admit to being married. He talked often of his son, Richie, now six, who this past year won a gold medal in his age group at the North Carolina state wrestling championships, was born. Steamboat is planning on working to expand and possibly move his ten-year-old gym in Charlotte.

Born of Japanese-American ancestry, Richard Blood grew up in Tampa where he placed in the state meet in high school wrestling. He was originally trained by Verne Gagne and given the name Sammy Steamboat Jr., after a Hawaiian wrestler who was a major name in the 60s, and billed as being from Hawaii. He changed the name to Rick Steamboat, still billed as Sam Steamboat's son, when he went to the Carolinas. His early success was in a singles feud with Flair, and after that formed one of the great babyface tandems of all-time with the late Jay Youngblood (Steve Romero) in the late 70s and continuing through 1984. He jumped to the WWF in 1985 and stayed through 1988, as a top level babyface the entire stint. Upon going to WCW, he was Flair's main rival for the first half of 1989, and left the company amidst a contract dispute over renewal, which at the time was very controversial among many wrestlers since Steamboat had continually put Lex Luger over at a time when other top WCW babyfaces were balking at doing jobs. He returned to the WWF, but on his second stint wasn't given much of a push, and had given notice he was leaving to retire, but was actually fired a few weeks earlier over not putting Undertaker over in a 3:00 television squash. He returned to WCW for a Clash of Champions on November 19, 1991 where he and Dustin Rhodes won the tag titles from Larry Zbyszko & Arn Anderson.

DECEMBER 12, 1994

**WWF:** Will the major influx of new young talent and going to the unproven Diesel as champion make fans feel the company is freshening up or going low-rent, particularly with the jump of Randy Savage to WCW combined with the others giving the public the perception (which isn't the case, but when the public had the opposite perception it also wasn't entirely the case) wrestlers are scampering in the other direction for the first time since 1984? It does appear that the rapid decline of 1992-94 has slowed although there are no indications that the situation is reversing either.

**WCW:** Will the new direction, which is attempting to copy WWF of the late 80s with the same talent, pay off? Thus far, when it comes to week-by-week interest level, it appears the company will spend more money for about the same or a slightly lessened amount of interest, but the Hogan name to this point has appeared to deliver PPV buys. Starrcade will be a major test because there's also been no proof that the Hogan name means much of anything without the Flair name attached to the other end of the marquee. It's also the first PPV they've tried where every match looks like death going in.

**AAA:** How will the promotion rebound from the loss of Love Machine, the glue that stuck the heel side together, and what appears to be the impending retirement of its top face, Perro Aguayo, particularly with Konnan on the heel side? The company, so deep in underneath talent that it's swimming in it, desperately needs to be able to successfully move a lot of guys up a notch or two or the promotion will encounter

serious difficulties. Will the promotion be able to capitalize on the success of its PPV and exposure to a new audience in the United States or has that opportunity already been squandered?

**AJW:** Coming off the biggest show in its history, can this group with no fresh match-ups to promote, maintain the level of popularity it has reached over the past two years, particularly when its biggest drawing card will be practically non-existent?

**NEW JAPAN:** Will the sellouts keep coming even though the quality and intrigue in the product is declining so rapidly with nothing fresh new in sight?

**ALL JAPAN:** Can another year of standing pat with the same faces and no changes in the hierarchy result in similar results of the previous years, particularly when noticeable chips at the foundation have taken place this past year with attendance declines and irregular television time slots? The main events may be the best matches in the world, but the top of the shows are in bad need of a freshening up. And the downside is with the quality so strong on top, there are extremely few who could be brought in and put in the top position without fans seeing through them if they aren't ready.

**FMW:** Onita is supposed to retire on May 5. What happens May 6, even when they shoot the expected angle later in the year to bring him back as crowds went way down in early 1994 when Onita was ill?

Off all the major offices opening 1995, only one doesn't enter the year with a question mark. Japan's UWFI. In 1994 they averaged a reported 15,812 fans per event, running eight shows, up from a reported 13,987 the previous year when they ran nine shows but the average was skewed upward by the one crowd of 46,000 for the first Takada-Vader. Keep in mind the level of upward attendance exaggeration by companies in Japan is no more or no less than American companies. But even though they are one company that doesn't enter the new year with a question mark, their entire promotion's drawing power is based on three headliners, Super Vader, Gary Albright and Nobuhiko Takada. Looking back, the company did a brilliant booking job this year in drawing those kind of consistent crowds with just three headliners rotating in singles and in occasional tags. Losing any one of the three would be devastating, plus after the Vader-Albright match takes place in January, there is no new match-up they can put together involving them. While there are booking ways of using three guys where you can keep the match-ups fresh for a long period of time, it's much harder with only two guys. It's a dangerous business, probably more so that style, and injuries can happen, particularly considering Vader is somewhat injury prone based on his style. There is no guarantee of him staying with UWFI for all of next year with all the options he always has. The company is also in the position where adding just one wrestler that can be pushed into the level of the top three would keep things fresh for another year, but like All Japan, it's not like they have this long list that can be brought in for that spot that its audience will accept because the standards have been set high and it's difficult for that audience either weaned on awesome matches or guys that have the ability to come across as very tough to accept people of lower standards on top.

As far as some of the key minor offices go, USWA is a survivor promotion. They've had one of their stronger runs in a long time on the back of Sid Vicious, who undoubtedly will at some point in 1995 join Titan Sports (and almost as surely leave Titan Sports in either 1995 or early 1996). But if they've survived this long, losing Sid Vicious isn't going to put them under. SMW has been shaky on a nightly basis but has one strong suit, an ability to build to and strongly promote major events. No-shows and failing to follow through on advertised stipps in key events in front of big crowds plagued them toward the latter part of 1994. They've had problems getting over new acts and thus have relied on wrestlers past-their-prime, which has worked well on recent big shows, but it's not the kind of stuff you can build a nightly territory around. ECW looks very strong in Philadelphia playing to the same crowd of 750 to 1,100 hardcore fans and doing a lot of new things with television but has yet to prove anything elsewhere. While I personally have enjoyed ECW television more than any other show for the past few months (sometimes the Japan shows when they have hot matches and some weeks AAA has been more enjoyable, but overall), one has

to recognize its strengths are also its drawbacks from growing much larger than its current level. I don't know the financial situation of the company, so if it can survive financially at the level it is, so be it and that's great. If it's in the red, and Tod Gordon isn't Ted Turner or even Vince McMahon, it needs more exposure to survive. The show will never get mass exposure in its current form in the current political climate of this country. It's too violent and the interviews are too strongly threatening for most television stations. Most station managers who have seen the tape are not as impressed as hardcore wrestling fans, and most indications are that even if that wasn't the case, 1995 is not the year station managers are looking at adding wrestling programming for the most part. A lot of people fail to realize that even though that may appeal to them, without the mass exposure, the group can't be a serious player on the national scene although it may be able to survive indefinitely on a regional level if it's not losing too much money because for the same reasons. Because of the make-up of its audience, it figures to lose less from its existing fan base than any other promotion in 1995. In its current form, it's strengths are what limits the losses of current fans, but also limits the number of new fans simply because they aren't going to be exposed to it to begin with.

DECEMBER 19, 1994

In a throwback to the type of thing that occurred in pro wrestling on occasion in the early part of the century and what no doubt will go down in wrestling history as one of its legendary stories that will be re-told for decades, the latest UWFI grandstand challenge backfired. Not only did this become a major news story in Japan and leave UWFI with something of a p.r. black eye, it also, along with several other things that took place, served to close the gap between interest in Japanese pro wrestling and other fighting forms.

As has been reported here several times, UWFI has thrown out grandstand challenges to Rickson (pronounced Hickson) Gracie, 36, the older brother of Royce Gracie of Ultimate Fight fame. Rickson Gracie (generally considered within the Jiu-Jitsu world to be legitimately tougher than his brother) along with his brother and the Gracie Jiu-Jitsu style have gained an enormous amount of popularity in Japan among the hybrid breed of wrestling and martial arts fans. This stemmed initially from Royce Gracie beating Ken Wayne Shamrock at the first UFC and spread when UFC and Gracie family videos became a hot item in Japan. Rickson capitalized on this a few months back by doing his own version of a UFC show (held in a boxing/wrestling ring as opposed to an octagon and with combatants wearing karate gloves instead of fighting bare-knuckle) in Tokyo and winning with what appeared to be little competition.

UWFI, which, as attendance figures show, has gained considerable popularity particularly among the hardcore Tokyo fans, to the point that based on the sometimes misleading stat of average attendance per show, it would be the No. 1 promotion anywhere and its top star, Nobuhiko Takada would be the hottest drawing card. Even though UWFI is a far more brutal style than most traditional pro wrestling, it is still pro wrestling at its base, but purports to be something different. With Lou Thesz, who has probably more experience at working different angles within the pro wrestling game than anyone living involved in the promotion, they have done several notable angles, grandstand challenges really, that are throwbacks to the 1920s U.S. promotional wars where companies would put their world titles on legitimate shooters and challenge the "workers" on top for the other promotions, which of course wouldn't accept. This would give the promotion issuing the challenge a public credibility as somehow being the tougher and more legitimate promotion and having the more worthy real champion.

The first grandstand challenge was made by UWFI to Masa Chono, then-NWA world heavyweight champion of New Japan, to take a match with Takada to determine who the real world champion was. This turned into enough of a story to the point actual negotiations, themselves something of a grandstand response by New Japan, took place. UWFI continued to challenge all the world champions, and then to make its own angle come true, signed Vader, at the time the WCW champion, for a huge money deal which eventually led to Vader submitting to Takada before more than 46,000 fans at a Tokyo baseball stadium one year ago to get over UWFI's storyline. Eventually

the UWFI fans accepted Vader as a one of their regulars opposed to being a WCW wrestler and they did the right thing for business, eventually putting him over Takada this year to give them a series of matches with those two and Gary Albright that could do consistent huge business. The second grandstand challenge was earlier this year when UWFI offered a supposed \$1 million purse to all the world champions from other major organizations if they could win UWFI's "Best in the world" tournament. This challenge got a lot of press in Japan, although it was ignored publicly by All Japan, WCW and WWF. New Japan failed to issue a response although Shinya Hashimoto, at the time the IWGP champ, blasted UWFI publicly, while WAR star Genichiro Tenryu gave an excuse why he couldn't appear. The grandstand play got even more heated when Rings star Akira Maeda was challenged, and he, a past-his-prime former major draw in Japan who made his reputation basically the same way, challenged back and put UWFI in hot water for a response, which ended with the public clamoring for a Maeda vs. Takada match, but since both sides were doing grandstands rather than setting up a pre-planned angle, nothing materialized.

The latest grandstand involved the Gracie brothers, first Royce, and the Rickson. At the UWFI shows in early October, the organization made announcements basically challenging either Royce or Rickson to appear on its 11/30 show for a cage match with Takada. Rumors abound that UWFI actually was in negotiations with Rickson before this, but whether that was the case or not, by the time the announcement was made, negotiations had fallen through. Apparently since Satoru Sayama, a pro wrestling legend of the early 80s as Tiger Mask, was involved in the promotion of the Gracie UFC in Japan, he explained the pro wrestling business to Gracie who it is believed wanted no part of it. UWFI was trying to work its own angle that it was the real toughest fighting group in the world as opposed to the Gracie Jiu-Jitsu which had become a hot item among hardcore wrestling and martial arts fans in Japan and people believed they were tougher than wrestlers. By November, Yoji Anjyo, 27, a UWFI mid-card wrestler who reportedly is considered the best of the Japanese crew when it comes to submission wrestling and who has a reputation for being a very tough individual, made a few challenges to Rickson Gracie, including a press conference in mid-November where he claimed he could beat Rickson Gracie in less than one minute.

To everyone's shock, Anjyo took the challenge one step farther. He flew to the United States earlier this week with no fanfare to back down Gracie and end the Gracie myth in Japan. Unannounced, on 12/7 at about 11:10 a.m., he showed up at the Gracie Jiu-Jitsu academy in Santa Monica where Rickson is the main instructor, went in and issued the challenge, expecting Rickson not to respond with since he would be facing an unknown foe with an unknown style and being given no notice. Anjyo would be played up in the press as backing Gracie down if Gracie didn't accept. Those close to the scene said that Anjyo was fully confident that in a shootfight an "80 kilogram (176 pound) guy" was no match for him at 220. Indeed Anjyo, who along with Yuko Miyato are heavily involved in the office and booking end of UWFI and largely pushed these grandstand ideas to get the group over as the real deal, had talked of another follow-up angle to take down Gracie. They would send a young UWFI wrestler to train with Gracie for several months and learn the style, and then challenge the sansei, force a showdown and beat him. Anjyo believed they wouldn't even have to send Masahito Kakiyama or Kiyoshi Tamura (UWFI's two most talented younger wrestlers) because even a lesser talented guy once learning the technique would be able to beat the smaller Gracie and expose the myth. Anjyo's confidence in his "shoot" ability was pretty strong based on his training and sparring work at the UWFI dojo where he was considered the best guy at submissions and a tough guy when it comes to fighting, because in what people claim was a shoot several years ago on a major card of the old UWF at the Tokyo Dome, Anjyo held a Muay Thai world champion kick boxer to a draw under Muay Thai rules, although Anjyo had an advantage in that he was several weight divisions up from the Muay Thai fighter. Additionally in the context of a worked match, he was forced into a confrontational position with an uncooperative Iron Sheik and humiliated him before they did their worked finish. Even though Sheik was old and fat at the time, he was still very much a feared man in the business.

The background takes longer to explain than what actually happened. In front of about 20 students in the academy, Gracie maneuvered

himself on top of Anijo and pummeled his face and body straight down with punches, similar to the style he employed in winning the Japanese UFC and that his brother used in most of his UFC matches. To Anijo's credit, even though he was getting pounded into oblivion, he didn't quit for what is believed to have been five to seven minutes until Gracie maneuvered him into a choke sleeper. But, according to an eye-witness, it was completely one-sided with Anijo getting no significant offense in. Anijo's face when it was over was said to have looked roughly twice as bad as a heavyweight boxer who had been pounded into oblivion.

Although in many ways this came off as the greatest angle of all to set up a Takada vs. Gracie match, those there insist there was no way in the world this match was anything but a shoot angle that backfired. Indeed, those within the Japanese wrestling business over the weekend, all pretty well acknowledged it wasn't an angle, although fans, who expect angles like this, are now all primed for a match with Takada that, unless Gracie agrees to work a program, will never take place and many are saying this will be a major blow to the UWFI promotion. My guess is that since it was Anijo, a mid-card guy, it won't really be a major blow. If it had been Takada in that situation, it would have been twenty times the story and have been a real p.r. disaster for the company.

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This all takes place during a ten day period where the concept of shootfighting and pro wrestling may draw closer together in both Japan and the United States.

UFC IV takes place on 12/16 on PPV from Tulsa, which includes a pro wrestler, ironically UWFI wrestler Dan Severn as one of the eight regular participants (because of the problem from the last show with injuries, there are six more participants being brought in, four for an alternates tournament which will also air on the PPV and two others as sub-alternates in case of injury to alternates). The format will remain the same with the exception of the alternates being added in, in that to win the tournament, someone must win three fights. Because of the structure of these almost anything-goes fights, which almost always go to the ground, it has become apparent that those proficient in ground fighting (wrestling, sambo, judo and Jiu-Jitsu) have the edge over stand-up fighters (sumo, karate, kung fu, kick boxing or boxing), but the gimmick is to create the style contrast to make the fights intriguing. Severn has the best wrestling credentials (including 18 years of sambo experience and national titles along with his freestyle and Greco-Roman credentials) of anyone that has entered and has 85 pounds on Royce Gracie. While the Gracie rep is that he can routinely beat 300-pound powerhouses and that size, strength and power aren't necessary because their style is all technique, this will be an interesting test of the size question because they have a big man who knows submissions and has experience. Gracie's edge is that he has more experience and has the major advantage of having no short supply of workout partners in his family members that have the technique to test him. In UFC II, Gracie defeated Renco Parduel of Holland (who went from UFC to Pancrase after the PPV), who had him by 85 pounds and was a European sambo (submission wrestling) champ, but Severn has much stronger wrestling credentials and more experience in a wider range of fighting styles than Parduel. In UFC III, a colorful tailor made-for-pro wrestling streetfighter named Kimo Leopoldo, with braided ponytail, tatoos, juiced-up look, obvious toughness and entering the ring with a cross on his back, who had Gracie by 70 pounds and had a huge strength and power advantage gave Gracie all he could handle in what was surely the most talked about UFC match ever. Although Kimo did submit and was bloodied up around the eyes, Gracie, who had never been seriously threatened in a UFC match, was beaten up so badly he couldn't continue in the tournament. An awful lot of viewers were left with the idea that even though Kimo submitted, he really beat Gracie, so much that off that one match, Kimo also became a marketable commodity in Japan.

The three prior UFC's have ranged from an 0.4 to an 0.65 buy rate, the latter figure, for UFC III, was better than all WCW PPV events in the last two years before the Hogan signing. UFC's research has shown that about 20% of its PPV audience is the audience that also buys pro wrestling PPV shows and wants to use bigger-name pro wrestlers to

increase that market share. However, a big name pro wrestler has everything to lose and almost nothing to gain by competing, not only the win/loss standpoint but because of the high injury risk.

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And the gap closes even tighter. Virtually all week in Japan the rumors were flying that Antonio Inoki's opponent on the 1/4 Tokyo Dome show would be--Kimo Leopoldo.

Kimo was brought in on 12/10 to Nagoya for a UFC rules match against Patrick Smith of Denver, who finished second to Gracie in UFC II after losing to Shamrock in UFC I on a card by K-1 promotions. The group runs Seido Kaikan Martial arts that has crossover appeal to many wrestling fans and this show became major news to wrestling fans because Inoki would be at the show and word was that the winner of Kimo vs. Smith, which most felt would be Kimo, would be his Tokyo Dome foe. This promotion has even garnered coverage by the Japanese wrestling magazines because its top star, Masaake Satake, a national martial arts hero, was the No. 2 drawing card for Akira Maeda's Rings before K-1 took off and began selling out major arenas at high ticket prices (this card drew a sellout 9,550). Based on what I'm told, and obviously these are all sticky situations but we've talked to many involved and on the periphery of late, UFC is a shoot (and if it isn't, several mainline media investigators can't dispute it either) while K-1 is similar to American boxing and Japanese sumo in that it is usually but not always a shoot. With that much of a wrestling connection, not to mention the fact Inoki would be at ringside to see the Kimo-Smith match, this match stole a tremendous amount of interest and thunder away among Japanese wrestling fans from the traditional All Japan tag team tournament finals going on at the same time at Budokan Hall.

Kimo beat Smith in 3:13 when he maneuvered himself on top of Smith and threw bare knuckle punch after punch before Smith was knocked out in what was called the most dangerous martial arts match in recent memory. Inoki and New Japan went into the dressing room after the match to negotiate with Kimo and manager Joe San. But by the next day, Inoki vs. Kimo had died out with Kimo turning down the proposal which obviously would have been for a worked match and probably for Kimo to do the job but also with a significant amount of money put on the table for Kimo to agree. Apparently K-1 was willing to go along with it because the publicity of working with Inoki on the biggest wrestling show of the year in the main event would only make Kimo a bigger drawing card to a larger number of fans since K-1 was planning a Kimo vs. Satake main event (which would be a kick boxing match rather than UFC style almost anything goes rules) for 3/3 at Budokan Hall. In fact, after the Kimo negotiations fell apart that night, K-1 offered Bronko Shikatek (sp?), who was their 1993 K-1 tournament heavyweight champion (and also won a match at the 12/10 show) for the Dome show. However that looks doubtful as well because Shikatek, who won a kick boxing match on that show, said that was his final match and he was retiring.

New Japan was hinting at a one-night tournament with Gerard Gordeau (UFC #1 finals loser to Gracie), Sting, Yoshiaki Fujiwara, Tony Palmore (American karate protege of Eddie Everett who was the originally rumored opponent) and Bart Vail (who has worked the old UWF, PWFG and Rings) at the Dome with the winner facing Inoki in the main event. The belief in Japan was that it would be impossible to get Sting or WCW to agree to that type of format plus five men is an odd number for a short tournament. It was announced that New Japan would make the announcement of Inoki's opponent on 12/13 in Osaka.

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UFC III ended with a lot of questions over who was really the best fighter in the tournament. UFC IV distinctly answered that question, but opened up numerous questions as to the future of what has turned into the most successful made-for-PPV new sports type entity.

Royce Gracie answered the lone remaining question about himself and his much-vaunted Gracie style jiu-jitsu style on 12/16 in Tulsa in the final match against sometime pro wrestler Dan Severn. The fact that Gracie, who weighed 180, could, through expertise in submissions on the mat, defeat boxers, kick boxers, street fighters or karate specialists was proven going in and quite frankly, made sense to anyone who understood the basic concepts of his style and limitations of other styles. But the lone question was could that style still come out victorious over a heavyweight submission wrestler, one with a substantial size and power advantage, and who also had skill and experience. Gracie's skill level is unquestioned. But could skill overcome substantial size and power when it was on an individual who was also very skilled. In Severn, who works for UWFI in Japan, Gracie would give up 80 pounds and face someone who has been both an Olympic calibre freestyle wrestler and a national champion in submission wrestling.

From a layperson or a spectator's point of view, it appeared Severn took Gracie down in seconds and remained on top throttling him for the entire match. It appeared to be totally one-sided, with only Gracie's unwillingness to concede keeping it from ending. Out of nowhere, Gracie hooked his legs around Severn's throat in a move called a "triangle" in jiu-jitsu and a figure four head scissors among Karl Gotch disciples of shootwrestling, then used his own hands to add to the pressure of the legs squeezing the throat in a choke fashion, and Severn submitted in 15:49. After the match Gracie reportedly told Severn that it was the toughest fight he'd ever been in, even though the scores of Gracie jiu-jitsu marks after the fight insisted that Gracie, although on the bottom and was apparently getting pummeled, was actually in control most of the match since he's very comfortable fighting from the bottom.

While it was clearly both the longest and most competitive match, and two best all-around fighters that have graced the octagon-shaped cage fighting pit since the UFC concept began more than one year ago, the event itself was both plagued and benefitted from one thing after another that was somewhat out of control of the promotion.

U.S. Senator John McCain, an Arizona Republican, made a lot of noise in the week prior to the event trying to get the event nixed. Tulsa County officials, which at first had approved the event, spent the last week trying to cancel it due to both political and media pressure on them for agreeing to a bare-knuckle almost anything goes fight. However, since the promoters had a signed contract months earlier, the officials were unable to break the contract. The Oklahoma boxing commission, which goes into effect on 1/1, claimed they would have shut the event down but it was taking place two weeks before they were empowered. The district attorney of Oklahoma, after being contacted by representatives of McCain, then attempted to find a bylaw allowing them to shut down the event and came up empty-handed. McCain also attempted to get Viewers Choice, Request and the cable industry to not broadcast the event, thereby shutting it down in another form. Because of the strong advance buys on PPV, that avenue didn't work, although talk that somehow the event may not take place continued as late as the day of the event. All the competitors were encouraged to play down the brutality in pre and post show media interviews, which originally was one of the main selling points of the prior shows.

All the publicity worked wonders locally in Tulsa with a full house of 5,800 grossing \$140,000. Based on the advance (about 4,000 tickets a few days before the show), the show had a good chance to sellout without the negative publicity which, when it came to drawing fans, was a positive.

Then came the second half of the disaster. Because UFC is a shoot and is live, it is impossible to time the event out like a traditional pro wrestling show. UFC III had nearly one hour of dead time because the preliminary fights went too short. In this case, they wanted to give each fighter at least 20 minutes between fights, but still finish the show in two hours. Based on the first three events, that wasn't going to be a problem. The promoters going in largely expected the Gracie-Severn final, since, barring the lucky or perfect punch or kick being thrown, the ground fighters will usually win in this mixed match environment. When Jeff Blatnick, the former Greco-Roman gold medalist who was brought

in as a color commentator was asked how long he expected a Severn-Gracie match to go the day before the event, he said that he didn't think there was any way Gracie could last 10:00 with Severn because of the fatigue factor. As it turned out fatigue never played a part in it on either side because both came in excellent shape. The longest match thus far in UFC history had been 11:00, and that was a preliminary fight with two stand-up fighters who wound up on the ground and didn't know any submissions and it became a battle of stamina rather than attempts at finishing techniques. So the belief was when they started the main event with 12:00 left of air time, it wasn't going to be a problem.

At about 10:00 in, with Gracie still at least appearing to be just hanging on, panic struck. The question under the gun was to either stop the match at 10 p.m. Central time and award a winner based on a decision, which surely would have been Severn, or to call the satellite company to keep the thing going and hope the cable companies themselves wouldn't pull the plug at 10 p.m. when the show was scheduled to end. Campbell McLaren, the promoter from Semaphore Entertainment Group, chose the latter. Depending upon the cable system, it either was either the right choice, or a total disaster.

Some systems, largely the most modern ones in the major markets controlled by programmed computers, went off the air at 10 p.m. sharp despite the show remaining on the satellite. That included systems in the places the show was expected to do the best business, such as Manhattan and Philadelphia which traditionally do well for UFC's, along with Detroit and Southern California, which were believed to do well since Severn lives near Detroit and Gracie in Torrance. The outcry from the viewing audience which paid \$19.95 and saw the show go off the air in the middle of the main event was exactly as one would expect, if not more so. Fans were furious. The promotion's own online service was filled with negative comments from those who hadn't seen the finish saying they weren't going to pay the bill. Some systems, particularly with Request TV affiliations, simply gave those who had ordered the first showing a free showing of the replay, which edited out a few minutes between matches so the finish and all the match time fit within the two hour window. Others, particularly with Viewers Choice affiliation, offered refunds. Still others refunded half the \$19.95 price to viewers.

"We have no idea of the damages," McLaren said Monday afternoon about the financial repercussions of the systems offering refunds. "It was my decision so I have to take the blame. We're trying to figure the timing out right and blew it by three-and-a-half minutes."

McLaren said the alternative, stopping the match and awarding the decision to Severn at that point, would have resulted in a hoard of Brazilians killing him since the Gracie family claims to have never lost a mixed match in some 60 years, particularly since after the fight members of the Gracie family insisted that at no point in the fight was Royce in any trouble, something that would be disputed by the vast majority of viewers.

Severn, who was immediately offered a spot on the next show although at press time hadn't 100% made up his mind to do it, was confident that he'd win in a rematch because of how well he did with only seven weeks of training for the event.

"I came close a few times but I could never get past his guard. I had him hurting a few times but I was never in a position to finish him off. He told me after the fight that I was the toughest person he had faced in his entire life. I'm very capable of beating him. I didn't do it this time, but he knows he was wrestling for his life. . . I scared the hell out of that man."

Severn's work as a pro wrestler was never brought up in commentary except when Blatnick at one point mentioned he'd done "shootfighting" in Japan because of UFC wanting from a perception standpoint to be viewed as being as different as pro wrestling as possible. After the show Severn said that while he believes nobody is unbeatable, a pure wrestler without a diversified fighting background wouldn't be able to beat Gracie.

"If you'd take someone out of the NCAA tournament finals, they'd get eaten up. I didn't go there as just a wrestler."

Although Severn didn't beat Gracie, because UFC was well covered in the regular sports pages along with both wrestling and martial arts magazines in Japan, it probably helped his marketability in that country and for UWFI. Severn's performance was a badly needed publicity boost for UWFI's attempt at getting the public to believe it's the real deal coming off the negative publicity of last week's impromptu encounter between Rickson Gracie and Yoji Anjyo. However, UWFI didn't want Severn to participate in this tournament for fear if he would lose it would reflect negatively on the organization and Severn went against their wishes. Even Severn wasn't sure right now what his future or status would be with that group except that he's not under contract with them. However, a win over Gracie in a rematch would be worth an untold amount of money to Severn as a pro wrestler in Japan for several different groups.

Severn, a 35-year-old father of four with something like 70 different national championships in freestyle, Greco-roman wrestling and sambo since being a teenage national champion in the mid-70s, received \$19,000 for the show (Gracie as the winner received \$64,000) by finishing second. His only guarantee going in was \$1,000, which is not a lot of money considering the injury risk because of the wide latitude of the rules. Even winning in the first round and losing in the second round only entails a \$3,000 payoff. Severn's limited training for the event was spaced around his regular job, working nights as a caterer, and family responsibilities. He was seconded by pro wrestler and training partner Al Snow during the show. Snow got off the best line of the show when annoying interviewer Brian Kilmeade between matches asked Severn what was he was going to do between matches, Snow responded sarcastically, "He's going to have sex, what do you think?" Severn still competes in amateur wrestling, judo and sambo, and captured the national championship in the 35-and-over age group in Greco-roman wrestling and sambo in 1994. He still has aspirations of making the 1996 Olympic team in either wrestling or possibly judo (sambo isn't an Olympic sport) although admits that age will be a tough adversary to overcome. He was an alternate in 1984 in freestyle to Lou Banach, who took the gold medal, and during that year at one point or another defeated all of the top six finishers in the Olympics. He was an alternate in 1988 to Bill Scherer, who took the bronze, during a year he was plagued by a knee injury. Because of personal and financial problems that took up all of his time, he had virtually no time for training in 1992.

Preliminary estimates were the show was going to do about an 0.85 buy rate (approximately 196,000 buys and \$1.76 million gross), but that would be a figure before whatever refunds cable companies may be giving because of the finish not airing. That actual figure when all is said and done will be significantly lower although nobody can estimate just how much lower right now. It was a huge increase from the three previous UFC's which ranged from 0.4 to 0.65. The show was successful enough that the original plan for run UFC V on 4/7 in Biloxi, MS may be changed this week to a March date in a different city because the promotion feels it is right now riding on tremendous momentum, particularly considering how hot the videos of the previous shows are at video stores. I expect future shows will be booked with a three-hour window, even though planned for two hours, to make sure the same problem doesn't materialize, although as the fighters get better, that may not be enough either. When pro wrestling on occasion was a shoot and the best went at it, their defensive ability was so strong matches often lasted hours such as the famous five hour shooting match between Joe Stecher and Strangler Lewis. In fact, although there were other reasons more prominent, that was one of the reasons pro wrestling turned into a work to avoid the marathon defensive stallfests that shoots with the top guys occasionally turned into. With the continued increase in buys from show-to-show, it appears this UFC will probably surpass WCW's Starrcade when it comes to buys and may be as little as one year away from surpassing WWF as a PPV entity, an amazing situation since they have no syndicated or cable television coverage, nor in their current format because of all the concern over brutality, will they be getting any without major rule changes which would water down the product. In addition, there is talk of changing the PPV format for the next show, in having an eight-man tournament, but keeping both Gracie and Severn out of it and having them meet in a main event singles match which

could be promoted like a boxing or wrestling main event. Promoters had earlier talked of, should Gracie win, putting Gracie in a singles match on UFC V against Ken Wayne Shamrock (who won the Pancrase version of the world heavyweight title the next night in Tokyo) and having an eight-man tournament underneath. But coming off this show, Severn is clearly more marketable than Shamrock as far as garnering interest for a match in March. Shamrock, because of his job situation with Pancrase, had said he didn't want to take the injury risk of doing three fights in one night as the tournament would entail, but wanted another match with Gracie (who beat him in UFC I).

There is also now talk of UFC doing a house show tour, but in order to tour in cities where there are athletic commissions, they would have the competitors wear karate gloves rather than fight bare knuckle. The idea is to use the house shows to create local champions who would then get a berth on the PPVs, which would turn into something akin to tournament of champions.

UFC IV opened with Gracie vs. Ron Van Clief, a 51-year-old living legend in martial arts with ten black belts to his credit. Although few expected Van Clief to have a chance because of his age, he was brought in because martial arts buffs who believe Mr. Miyagi in the Karate Kid movies is real, kept claiming that the UFC guys wouldn't let the teachers who have all the experience in. Van Clief has the reputation in his world that Karl Gotch had in his. Van Clief was a remarkable physical specimen for 51 and even Severn, while watching him train earlier in the week, was amazed. However when Van Clief threw his first kick, Gracie grabbed the foot and easily took him down. While on top Gracie threw a few elbows to the head and punches, working for the opening, then got the choke sleeper in 3:49.

Keith Hackney, a karate fighter who knocked down 600-pound Emmanuel Yarborough with one punch at the last UFC, faced Joe Son, best known as the manager of Kimo, in the second and worst match on the show. Like Kimo, Joe Son came out strapped to a cross with an AAA style ring entrance. Although the 5-4, 235 pound Son took him down and got him in a front facelock which looked like it should have been the finish, Hackney broke it throwing punches including three brutal direct shots to the groin right on camera. Those three shots will no doubt air on news stations over the next few weeks when the cry is made to ban this since that was really the only example of what could be visually shown as over-the-edge brutality on the show. Hackney got his palm across Son's throat and he submitted in 2:42.

Next up was Steve Jennum, the UFC III winner, against Jamaican pro boxer Melton Bowen who was billed as the WBF Intercontinental heavyweight champion which sounded like a pro wrestling title. This was a brutal fight. Jennum took Bowen down and threw several punches straight down. Bowen tagged Jennum several times as well. One punch was so powerful it appeared to turn the tide as it shook Jennum off him and put them both on their feet again. However, Jennum took Bowen down with a hiptoss that the old Mid South pro wrestling crowd popped like crazy for. They traded punches with Jennum on top, Jennum's being weak from exhaustion, Bowen's being comparatively weak because he was punching from the bottom although it was obvious Bowen had a strong punch. Jennum finally caught him in a short-arm scissors at 4:47. After the match a banged-up Jennum said he was feeling great and ready to go for another match, but once the adrenaline stopped flowing, his hand which had thrown all the bare knuckle punches started hurting. Bowen's hard punches also left Jennum with a hairline fracture of the jaw. So he was unable to continue.

Severn debuted against kick boxer Anthony Macias, a local favorite from Oklahoma City. Macias drenched himself in baby oil figuring if he could slip out of Severn's holds, he'd have a chance. When this was discovered, he was wiped down with three towels before the match since the rules specifically forbid this, but he was still very slippery which left Severn visibly mad and he complained about it after the match. But the trick made no difference since Severn charged him and suplexed him out of his boots a few times before catching him in the sleeper in 1:45.

Gracie vs. Hackney was another brutal fight. Hackney was one tough fighter, hanging in there as a stand-up style striking fighter in a match



that was largely on the ground. He got a lot of good punches in and marked Gracie up before Gracie got the short arm scissors in 5:34. In a post-match interview, Hackney said he ran out of gas first and that's why he lost.

Severn then faced alternate Marcus Bossett (who had won a prelim alternates tournament match before the PPV started to qualify), a karate practitioner. Severn won with a reverse headlock submission (similar to Mitsuharu Misawa's facelock) in :52. Bossett threw one great kick to the stomach which momentarily stunned Severn, but when he threw a second kick, Severn caught the kick and with Bossett balanced on one leg, he was easy prey for Severn's takedown. Once on the mat, it was only a matter of when he'd be history.

At this point came the low point of the show. For whatever reason, interviews have never been the strength on these shows to begin with. Brian Kilmeade interviewed several guys coming out of the cage asking largely inane questions and you could read the faces of the guys that they weren't thrilled about it. Anyway, this was topped off when Kimo was brought out to a huge reaction. Both the announcer and co-promoter Art Davie tried to do what appeared to be a grandstand saying something like these fans want to know right now if Kimo will be in UFC V. Kimo and Joe Son both appeared annoyed at the pressure being put on them to say "Yes" since apparently this hadn't been worked out ahead of time and he hadn't agreed to compete. So instead of addressing the question, both went off talking about Jesus Christ until basically they put another mic on live and cut the cameras away from them while they kept talking. There is definitely a time and a place to talk religion, and this was definitely neither the time nor the place. This was like the worst of bad wrestling. In addition, if negotiations aren't completed, something like that putting a guy on the spot shouldn't be done on live television because it's total bush league. Since the date of the next one wasn't a sure thing and Kimo has a major fight at Budokan Hall on 3/3 against Masaake Satake, the situation is possible that he couldn't have accepted even if he wanted to. They held a qualifying match for the next show where Guy Mezger, a stand-up fighter, qualified, although from the looks of things, he didn't look to stand much of a chance if he were to be matched with someone the calibre of a Gracie or a Shamrock.

Gracie vs. Severn would once and for all answer all questions about Gracie's technique working against someone of far superior size and power who also had technique. Severn took him down immediately and with his powerful riding strength, stayed on top of him the entire fight. Both tried chokes and were blocked by the other. Gracie fought a great defensive fight, but Severn was on top throughout. At about 12:00, Gracie went for the triangle choke with his ankles but Severn got away from it. No matter what his disciples will say, Severn had Gracie in a very bad way with his forearm hard pressed straight down on Gracie's throat and at other times had him folded almost in two backed against the cage, but the guy didn't submit and was always quick to squirm out of trouble. Out of nowhere, Gracie went for the triangle again, a move Severn had never even heard of or seen until it was wrapped around his throat, and Severn had to tap out.

With only two or three exceptions, virtually all the thumbs downs and in the middles came from people whose coverage of the show went out at the 12:00 mark of the main event with it still in progress. The response level was also significant because we didn't list that we were doing a poll on the event and haven't in the past for UFC's. I hadn't considered it originally because thumbs up/thumbs down is largely an entertainment decision and it's unfair to judge non-worked competition as entertainment because the most competitive fights have a tendency, because the fighters are so skilled at defense, to be the most boring to the casual spectator. However, in the week leading to the event, I could sense just how much interest there was among readers so we'll be doing polls for all future UFC's.

As for other aspects of the show, the introduction pieces on the specific fighters were strong. The between match interviews were terrible with Brian Kilmeade coming off as UFC's answer to Michael Buffer. Brian Beck was fine on play-by-play. Virtually everyone knocked Jim Brown's performance, especially since he came off so confrontational with Jeff Blatnick in spots, and Blatnick did everything short of patronizing Brown to ease the tension. But Brown is almost a

staple of these events and a genuine celebrity presence whose own tough-guy reputation fits in well with the events. Blatnick was good in analysis, but not nearly as good as he was in UWFI for two reasons. One, he didn't work well with Brown in spots, second while he knows all about wrestling, he wasn't as familiar with Jiu-Jitsu. The announcers before the final match all felt Severn would win because of superior strength and that he was totally in control the entire match. Blatnick's analysis called the match as if Gracie had no chance to win, which if anything, made his victory that much more dramatic to the audience watching. However Blatnick's commentary was so pro-Severn because both were fellow wrestling stars during the same time period so were compadres so to speak, that he downplayed much of what Gracie was doing as having no effect and his moves, even his attempts at the triangle, as meaning nothing when as it turned out it was a strong enough move to finish Severn.

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New Japan also announced its main event for the 1/4 Tokyo Dome show. As mentioned last week, the original plan was for a martial arts match with Antonio Inoki vs. Kimo, however Kimo and his manager Joe Son decided against doing business and apparently didn't understand what pro wrestling was all about. The K-1 martial arts promotion offered Bronko Shikatec (sp?) to New Japan, who was its champion last year, to fill the spot but Shikatec later that night announced he was retiring. New Japan has gone to a four-man tournament, with Sting vs. kick boxer Tony Palmora, who as the storyline goes, is being sent by "Monster Man" Eddie Everett, who had a famous mixed match with Inoki in the late 70s, for revenge; the other side of the bracket is Inoki vs. Gerard Gordeau, the Savate and martial arts champ from Holland who was a finalist in UFC I and also had a famous mixed match in 1989 against Akira Maeda. No doubt this leads to Inoki vs. Sting as the final main event on the show.

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Toxicology reports came back this past week on Art Barr, and revealed nothing that would answer the question as to what he died from. The reports indicated illegal drugs have been ruled out as a cause of death however he did have a combination of prescription drugs in his system and there was alcohol in his blood. Coroner Frank Ratti has not determined that either the amount of prescription drugs was a lethal amount or that the death was due to combining drugs and alcohol. As of now he has yet to determine a cause of death nor does he know when, if ever, it can be determined what was the cause of his death.

In a story in the 12/20 Oregonian, columnist Margie Boule, who wrote several scathing columns about Barr while covering both the rape story and the aftermath of it, wrote another column. This was largely based on the negative reaction to her previous columns years ago while covering the rape story from wrestling fans who she claimed got angry because he was portraying a good guy character and didn't seem to care he plead guilty to a plea bargained version of the original charge. She noted that Springfield police won't release the police report on the case but said that Valium and Halcyon were found in his home along with drugs from Mexico, believed to be a Mexican equivalent of Percodans. In the story Ratti, said that since he had been in a coma for several hours, traces of drugs could have been metabolized by the body.

Barr, 28 had come into his own over the past 15 months after turning heel as one of the biggest stars in the world wrestling under the name Love Machine for AAA in Mexico and the United States. He failed to wake up on 11/23 in his home in Springfield, OR after going to sleep the night before.

As expected, there was a ton of coverage in all the Mexican magazines dated the first week of December. Box y Lucha, considered the bible of Mexican wrestling, had three different stories and a centerfold cartoon drawing on the subject, with a story talking about how November had always turned into a significant month since he had been in Mexico. Barr's first main event ever at Arena Mexico was on 11/15/91 where he was a face teaming with Black Magic & Mascara Sagrada vs. Pierroth Jr. & Jerry Estrada & Blue Panther. That match

began the Machine-Panther rivalry which turned into one of the biggest feuds in the recent history of Mexican wrestling. Of course, his debut with the AAA promotion was on 11/6/92. On 11/5/93, he and Eddy Guerrero lost the AAA world tag team titles to El Hijo del Santo & Octagon (which they later regained on July 23, 1994 in Chicago). 11/6/94 was the biggest match of his career in Los Angeles in the double mask vs. double hair match against Santo & Octagon. And he died on 11/23/94.

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As expected, the Rickson Gracie-Yoji Anjo impromptu fight in the basement of Gracie's gym in Santa Monica remained a subject of huge news in Japan. It was the cover photo and the first four pages of both Weekly Gong and Weekly Pro Wrestling in Japan, despite the fact no quality photos were taken of the actual fight because Gracie refused to allow the photographers Anjo had brought with him downstairs and the only actual spectators were 23 Gracie students, one of whom had Gracie's video camera. Gracie sent the tape to Satoru Sayama, a former UWF wrestler now at odds with UWFI, who invited the press to a showing of the tape on 12/12. There were still pages of poor photos in both magazines because photographers tried to shoot through a downstairs window but the shots were all unclear. The covers of both mags were post-match photos of Anjo with a puffed up bloody face. That kind of coverage speaks of how big the story was there since it was the same week as both the All Japan and All Japan women's tag tournament finals, Sabu jumping, New Japan holding a few major shows and negotiating with Kimo for the Tokyo Dome, the Kimo-Patrick Smith K-1 match and came out days before the two-night Pancrase world title tournament. Although the situation was covered in last weeks' issue, Rickson Gracie, who from a business standpoint is no longer affiliated with the rest of his family, sent a press release giving his side of the story. At the time he got into the fight, he was under the assumption he was fighting Nobuhiko Takada.

"On 07 December, a UWF representative dressed in a black suit (editors note--this was Shinji Sasazaki, who runs the UWFI business in the United States out of their Nashville office and was a former New Japan wrestler) accompanied by his colleague (sp) Kathy Staggs, showed up at my studio at approximately eleven o'clock in the morning. They demanded to speak with me. I was not present in the studio at the time. However, normal classes were being conducted in the studio.

My assistant, fearing for the welfare of the students because of the belligerent and antagonistic attitude of the UWF representatives, called and told me to come to the studio immediately. My wife, Kim, was also advised of the situation. I grabbed my video camera which was low on batteries and rushed to the studio. Kim followed me in another car.

When I arrived at the studio, I questioned Kathy Staggs and the UWF representative as to the reason for their visit. I thought that the representative could be the fighter named Takada. My wife, who manages my business, and my attorney, have explained to Ms. Staggs on many occasions that if they want to talk about business, they will need to contact my attorney in writing. This is because they are constantly changing their story by saying one thing, and then telling the press another fabricated version. At this point, the UWF representatives then advised me that they did not come to talk about business, they came to fight.

I accepted the challenge, again thinking that the big UWF representative was Takada. I had a few seconds to stretch before they brought in another man who they had kept hidden in the car. This unknown man was who I was to fight. After the fight was over, a Japanese student who was present at the studio told me that the individual I had fought was a UWF fighter known as Mr. Anjo (sp)."

JANUARY 2, 1995

Perhaps the most common phrase you'll hear inside wrestling is "drawing money." If a guy is acknowledged universally as a great worker but someone wants to knock him, the first thing he'll say is, "He

can't draw any money?" or "Has he drawn any money?" If someone wants to knock a big drawing card who has had a bad match or never has a good match for that matter, the quick response is always, "he drew money." To promoters who looked at the bottom line and nothing else on the show, drawing money, or another similar phrase, "putting asses in the seats," was the be all and end all of pro wrestling.

In recent years, the importance of drawing money at the box office has decreased. With PPV revenue, largely drawn based on promotional efforts and catchy show names rather than match-ups themselves, and their revenue potential is potentially astronomical compared with live gates, drawing money at the houses has lost a measure of significance even though the phrase is probably quoted no less today than at any other time. In addition, today's major wrestling companies either have corporate sponsors, television ad revenue, merchandise revenue and licensing revenue. Some are simply owned by large corporations where the bottom line hardly takes on the significance it did when promotions were family businesses often run by ex-wrestlers of comparable limited economic means working small towns needing to show a profit to survive. In addition, today's biggest drawing shows are drawn more based on the name of the show and recent history of the show as opposed to what matches the show has on top. Wrestlemania or the New Japan Tokyo Dome show will draw huge crowds based on the name, and the persons or match-ups headlining aren't really what drew the money as opposed to the history and the promotion. Bret Hart, Lex Luger and Yokozuna headlined Wrestlemania last year and it was the biggest PPV event of the year. But if the same triangular match was put on Survivor Series and Undertaker vs. Yokozuna was at Wrestlemania, it would still be Wrestlemania as the show that drew the big money. Similar to New Japan putting on a show at the Dome, Yokohama Arena or Sumo Hall. It doesn't really matter the main event, the show that's going to draw the money is the one at the Dome, and pretty much any show they book at Sumo Hall is going to draw 10,000 fans whether Inoki, Choshu or Fujinami appear or not. The only wrestlers who appear to be the exception to the rule in that just by their presence they can greatly alter business are Hulk Hogan, who did double the buy rates in his first two PPV matches although the jury is still out on his long-term, Atsushi Onita who is a one man promotion when it comes to drawing the big crowds, and perhaps Antonio Inoki, although within the confines of New Japan, the company is so strong he doesn't need to appear regularly which may be the beauty of the system. Inoki probably would burn out with frequent appearances and New Japan draws without him, but since the fans see him so seldom, he still means something for the big shows. However, they've done stadium shows and drawn 50,000 fans without him as well.

Nevertheless, there is something to be said for wrestlers who are in the top positions on shows that draw big crowds. It's a funny phrase--drawing money. Everyone in wrestling talks about it. Nobody in wrestling ever looks at it or studies it. I've been told a million times what draws money, but nobody ever has any evidence to back up any of those million theories because nobody has ever really examined it.

We've compiled a list of all the shows in 1994 that drew in excess of 10,000 fans and the wrestlers in either the top match (if it was pretty much drawn by the main event) or the top two matches (if it was the strength of the show and not one singular match that should get credit) to see who, in 1994, really drew money as opposed to who everyone talks about as drawing money. We'll see those are two different things. Shows that were significantly papered and drew more than 10,000 aren't included in the list as we are talking about drawing money, and not drawing paper in this article. We'll see what conclusions we can draw from it.

JANUARY

4 - Tokyo Dome (NJPW) - Inoki vs. Tenryu/Hashimoto vs. Chono - 58,000

20 - Veracruz (AAA) - Konnan-Octagon-Sagrada vs. Caras-Fishman-Panther - 10,000\*

21 - Tokyo Budokan (Rings) - Maeda vs. Taniel - 11,036

23 - Providence (WWF) - Royal Rumble/Undertaker vs. Yokozuna - 14,500\*

## FEBRUARY

6 - Dortmund (WWF) - Bret Hart vs. Yokozuna - 13,000\*

13 - Zapopan (AAA) - Konnan-Aguayo-Tinieblas Jr. vs. Dinamita - 12,500

17 - Tokyo Sumo Hall (NJPW) - Hashimoto vs. Tenryu/Steiners vs. Liger & Power - 11,500\*

24 - Tokyo Budokan (NJPW) - Hashimoto vs. Liger - 14,214

25 - Tokyo Budokan (UWFI) - Tamura vs. Kakahara/Takada-Sano vs. Albright-Severn - 16,500\*

## MARCH

2 - Tokyo Sumo (WAR) - Onita-Goto vs. Tenryu-Hara - 11,500\*

3 - Pachuca (AAA) - Konnan-Octagon-Sagrada vs. Cat-Mascara Ano 2000-Universo 2000 - 15,000\*

5 - Tokyo Budokan (AJPW) - Misawa-Kobashi vs. Hansen-Baba - 16,300\*

12 - Los Angeles (AAA) - Konnan vs. Roberts - 13,823

19 - Toluca (AAA) - Konnan-Metal-Aguayo vs. Fishman-Estrada-Cat - 20,000

20 - New York (WWF) - Bret vs. Yokozuna/Luger vs. Yokozuna - 18,065\*

21 - Leon (AAA) - Dinamita vs. Machine-Cat-Chicano Power - 10,000\*

21 - Nagoya (NJPW) - Hashimoto vs. Norton - 11,000\*

27 - Yokohama (AJWPW) - Hokuto-Kandori vs. Kong-Nakano 15,000

27 - Dortmund (WWF) - Luger vs. Yokozuna 12,000

## APRIL

3 - Osaka (UWFI) - Takada vs. Yamazaki/Vader vs. Hashimikov - 14,000

15 - Arena Mexico (EMLL) - Charles vs. Fiera - 10,000

16 - Tokyo Sumo (NJPW) - J Cup Sasuke vs. Pegasus - 11,500\*

16 - Tokyo Budokan (AJPW) - Carnival Final Kawada vs. Williams - 16,300\*

29 - Xalapa (AAA) - Octagon-Konnan-Caras-Sagrada vs. Machine-Cat-Guerrero-Panther - 18,000

30 - Veracruz (AAA) - Octagon vs. Panther - 10,000\*

## MAY

1 - Fukuoka Dome (NJPW) - Inoki vs. Muta/Hashimoto vs. Fujinami - 45,000

5 - Kawasaki Stadium (FMW) - Onita vs. Tenryu - 52,000\*

6 - Tokyo Budokan (UWFI) - Vader vs. Kakahara/Takada vs. Lydick - 16,500\*

14 - Anaheim (WWF) - Bret vs. Owen - 10,900

15 - Zapopan (AAA) - Konnan-Aguayo-Caras vs. Roberts-Machine-Perez/Sagrada vs. Cat - 11,200

20 - MSG (WWF) - Bret vs. Owen - 11,000

22 - Juarez (AAA) - Konnan-Aguayo-Tinieblas Jr.-Metal vs. Machine-Guerrero-Satanico-Chicano Power 10,000

27 - Tijuana (AAA) - Konnan vs. Roberts - 18,000

31 - Tokyo Budokan (Pancrase) - Suzuki vs. Smith - 11,000

## JUNE

3 - Tokyo Budokan (AJPW) - Misawa vs. Kawada - 16,300\*

10 - Tokyo Budokan (UWFI) - Takada vs. Albright/Vader vs. Tamura - 16,500\*

15 - Tokyo Budokan (NJPW) - Hashimoto vs. Choshu/Steiners vs. Power-Hase - 14,201

19 - Baltimore (WWF) - King of Ring/Lawler vs. Piper/Hart vs. Diesel - 12,000\*

25 - Montreal (WWF) - Quebecers vs. Shrinkers/Bret vs. Owen - 12,248

## JULY

14 - Manila (WWF) - Bret vs. Owen - 14,000

15 - Mexico City (AAA) - Dinamitas-Parka vs. Konnan-Sagrada-Aguayo-Lizmark 10,600\*

17 - Tokyo Sumo (WAR) - Tenryu-Onita-Bigelow vs. Hara-Tenta-Shinzaki/Dragon vs. Sasuke - 11,050

28 - Tokyo Budokan (AJPW) - Misawa vs. Williams - 16,300\*

## AUGUST

3 - Tokyo Sumo (NJPW) - Chono vs. Choshu/Muto vs. Fujiwara - 11,500\*

4 - Tokyo Sumo (NJPW) - Hase vs. Power - 11,500\*

5 - Tokyo Sumo (NJPW) - Hashimoto vs. Power/Muto vs. Choshu - 11,500\*

5 - Arena Mexico (EMLL) - Perez-Santana vs. Silver King-Texano - 11,000

6 - Tokyo Sumo (NJPW) - Chono vs. Yatsu/Choshu vs. Fujiwara - 11,500\*

7 - Tokyo Sumo (NJPW) - Chono vs. Power - 11,500\*

18 - Tokyo Budokan (UWFI) - Vader vs. Takada - 16,500\*

19 - Mexico City (AAA) - Aguayo-Satanico vs. Konnan-Caras - 10,200

24 - Tokyo Budokan (AJWPW) - Kong-Hokuto vs. Kansai-Hotta - 15,560\*

28 - Osaka (FMW) - Onita vs. Aoyagi - 15,382\*

29 - Chicago (WWF) - Undertaker vs. Undertaker/Bret vs. Owen - 23,000\*

## SEPTEMBER

3 - Tokyo Budokan (AJPW) - Williams vs. Kobashi - 16,300\*

23 - Yokohama (NJPW) - Inoki vs. Ruska/Hashimoto vs. Power - 17,000\*

24 - Nagoya (NJPW) - Muto-Pegasus vs. Liger-Choshu/Chono vs. Hawk - 11,000\*

27 - Osaka (NJPW) - Hashimoto vs. Chono/jr. finals - 11,000

28 - Veracruz (AAA) - Santo-Panther-Aguayo vs. Konnan-Machine-Chicano Power - 10,000\*

## OCTOBER

8 - Tokyo Budokan (UWFI) - Albright-Yamazaki vs. Vader-Tenta - 16,500\*

14 - Osaka (UWFI) - Albright-Yamazaki vs. Vader-Tenta - 14,000

15 - Tokyo Sumo (Pancrase) - Funaki vs. Suzuki - 11,000

21 - Montreal (WWF) - Rougeau vs. Oulette - 16,843\*

22 - Tokyo Budokan (AJPW) - Williams vs. Kawada - 16,300\*

30 - Tokyo Sumo (NJPW) - Hase-Muto vs. Machine-Chono/Steiners vs. Norton-Simmons - 11,500\*

## NOVEMBER

6 - Los Angeles (AAA) - Konnan vs. Aguayo/Machine-Guerrero vs. Santo-Octagon - 12,024

13 - Juarez (AAA) - Konnan vs. Aguayo - 12,900

20 - Tokyo Dome (AJWPW) - V tourney Kong vs. Hokuto - 42,500

29 - Reynosa (AAA) - Aguayo-Lizmark-Sagrada vs. Fishman-Espectro-Blanco - 10,000

30 - Tokyo Budokan (UWFI) - Albright vs. Takada - 16,500\*

## DECEMBER

10 - Tokyo Budokan (AJPW) - Tag tourney finals Baba-Hansen vs. Kawada-Taue, Misawa-Kobashi vs. Williams-Ace - 16,300\*

11 - Nagoya (NJPW) - Choshu-Muto vs. Fujinami-Fujiwara - 11,000\*

16 - Tokyo Sumo (Pancrase) - World title tourney, Shamrock vs. Smith/Funaki vs. White - 11,000

17 - Tokyo Sumo (Pancrase) - World title tourney, Shamrock vs. Yamada - 11,500\*

20 - Nagoya (FMW) - Onita vs. Pogo - 11,085\*

\*Denotes a sellout crowd

The first and most obvious conclusion is when it comes to drawing money, the promotion is what does it, not the wrestlers. Second is the shows that draw are cards either with fancy names or promoted as "big shows" because of their venue rather than because of the main event. It appears we all overemphasize the importance when a promotion announces a weak line-up for a PPV show, because (with the exception of the Hogan-Flair series which was unique) it appears the match-ups have less to do with it than we had imagined. That's the last thing any wrestler, particularly one making a big salary, wants to read.

The greatest draw in the world (Hulk Hogan) couldn't draw big crowds on a consistent basis in the wrong environment, even with the right opponent. While he seemed to significantly increase the crowd on every show he appeared which is something very few in this business can boast of, not once all year did he draw a crowd in excess of 10,000 paid. Hulk Hogan, Sting and Ric Flair don't even appear on the list once, largely because they were in the wrong place. The unlikely name of Bitarze Taniel does appear, and he wasn't in a hot promotion either, but was on the right big show in the main event. In 1994, Mascara Sagrada, the uncharismatic big guy and not the mini who does have a lot of charisma, headlined more big crowds than virtually all of the most charismatic wrestlers in the world because he was with a hot promotion. By promotion, we have 17 New Japan shows on that list, 17 AAA shows, 11 WWF, Eight UWFI, Seven All Japan, Four Pancrase, Three All Japan women and FMW, Two WAR and EMLL and One Rings. For Japan, I'd say we didn't miss any shows for any of the groups. We may have missed one or two with WWF in foreign countries but surely got most of them. For AAA, I'm sure we missed several because they run so many shows that we never hear about, but we got the vast majority and certainly enough to know who it was that was on top on the shows that drew well. About the only real conclusion this list gives is that wrestling draws a lot more big crowds in Japan than anywhere else, followed by Mexico and as many have noticed, the United States is something of a third-rate power although the U.S. is the only one with PPV and an overabundance of free wrestling on television. So, we should expect New Japan and AAA wrestlers to dominate the list because the promotions ran more shows that drew big crowds. And we find exactly that. AAA wrestlers have a double advantage, because most of their shows are headlined by six mans or eight mans, which puts more guys in the running so in those matches to keep things fair we'll only count the captain and one other major draw on each team so that way Mascara Sagrada isn't getting credit for big houses that he really didn't draw. Anyway, let's look at what wrestlers drew put the asses in the seats on the greatest number of occasions the past year and for a secondary stat, for those who were in better than half of the big drawing matches of their company, we'll give them a percentage. If nothing else, that percentage may be a good indication of the value of the wrestler to the promotion. If Wrestler of the Year is similar to the baseball MVP award in that the most valuable player to a contending team, or in this case, the most valuable when it comes to putting asses in the seats with a successful company, this percentage is probably something fairly important to consider.

Konnan 13 (76%); Perro Aguayo 10 (58%); Shinya Hashimoto 9 (53%); Bret Hart 8 (73%); Masa Chono 7; Love Machine 6; Cien Caras 6; Keiji Muto 6; Kensuke Sasaki 6; Nobuhiko Takada 6 (75%); Vader 6 (75%); Riki Choshu 6; Genichiro Tenryu 5 (100%); Gary Albright 5 (63%); Atsushi Onita 5 (100%); Steve Williams 5 (71%); Owen Hart 5; Mitsuharu Misawa 4 (53%); Toshiaki Kawada 4 (53%); Octagon 4; Yokozuna 4; Black Cat 4; Kenta Kobashi 3; Akira Hokuto 3 (100%); Aja Kong 3 (100%); Kazuo Yamazaki 3; Hiroshi Hase 3; Jushin Liger 3;

Antonio Inoki 3; Yoshiaki Fujiwara 3; Undertaker 3; Blue Panther 3; Mascara Ano 2000 3; Jake Roberts 3; Steiners 3; John Tenta 3.

The only thing that can really be learned from this list of names by itself is that successful promotions putting on major shows is what draws big crowds, not the charisma of the people they put in the main events. But this list, if nothing else, gives one a list of what several reasonably successful companies in 1994 used in the top drawing positions. If it doesn't show a trend of what sells to fans, at the very least it shows a trend of what promotions that were successful were giving fans.

The next step is to take these names and try to find one or two key attributes that are the key to each individual's personal marketability. Maybe with that we can determine what really sells, or at least did sell in 1994 since the world's fads are constantly changing.

By doing this we can determine, besides the obvious charisma, what draws money in wrestling today or at least what the successful promotions are pushing to draw money. The two main attributes are, believe it or not, wrestling skill (perceived skillful ringwork as opposed to acrobatic work or hard but not skilled work); and perceived toughness, each of which fit nine of the names on the list.

It has been said so many times that many have come to accept it that interview ability is what draws money, yet in 1994 that clearly wasn't a factor at all with any major promotion in drawing big crowds. Probably the only places interviews were even a factor in drawing crowds were small American territories. SMW one can trace a correlation between size of the crowd and quality of the interviews leading to the show. USWA bigger crowds seem to better be traced to an intriguing match-up, while ECW largely drew about the same regular crowd to its big shows each time out. Nor was having a bodybuilder physique any factor at all this year in drawing fans, contrary to what may be popular belief. The only name on the list where interviews played even a small part in their success was Bret Hart and I don't think anyone would list that as one of Hart's two best attributes. Jake Roberts is a good interview but the three shows he headlined that drew more than 10,000 he didn't do one interview for them. When he worked an area where interviews were relied on, he didn't draw at all even though he gave great interviews.

The next most important factors are physical impressiveness, which, as written above, in 1994 doesn't mean a bodybuilder physique. Konnan is the only one on the list who even fits that description so a bodybuilder physique is almost passe. What several on the list have is a look that exudes power and physical domination such as a Vader, Steve Williams, Yokozuna or Aja Kong. Equally as important is simply legendary status. Even if the wrestler is past their prime and no longer a strong performer. Even if they don't have any obvious attribute that would attract a new younger audience, if a name performer from the past is put in an important match, the name can still sell more tickets than a less famous but better performer. My feeling is we've been underrating this attribute greatly. People like Cien Caras, Riki Choshu and Genichiro Tenryu are stars simply because they've been stars for so long that they have name value and were once good, so living off ones reputation is still a key factor in drawing money, today. It's a lot more important than doing good interviews, having a good gimmick, having a bodybuilder physique, wearing a cool ring costume or doing acrobatic moves. Antonio Inoki is a drawing card because he's a legend and always will be a drawing card. Of course as a general rule using wrestlers past their prime and living off their reputation makes for some crummy main events (and to some of their credits, some even though they physically aren't at their peak, aren't content to live off previously earned reps and still work very hard), but quality is an issue for another day. Next comes fire, that explosiveness of ringwork of a Kenta Kobashi or Toshiaki Kawada. Moving down the list we have a never-say-die attitude such as an Atsushi Onita or a Perro Aguayo, equally as important as doing cool wrestling moves (Steiners and Jushin Liger). Just as important as either of those attributes is no reason at all but being in the right spot and just having been part of the right grouping for years which fits a Masa Chono or a Mascara Ano 2000. Way down on the list, and the only other attribute that were one of the key attributes of more than one name on the list is simply having a cool look of a matinee idol, like Nobuhiko Takada or Bret Hart, which again seems to be highly overrated by most as far as actually drawing

people. Way down on the list were things like having a good gimmick (the only two who seemed to make it primarily on a gimmick were Undertaker and Octagon), acrobatic ring moves or acting psychology, all of which appear to be totally overrated as far as drawing money today. I get the impression a lot of companies are spending far too much time coming up with gimmicks for bad wrestlers in the hopes of recreating an Undertaker, but that happens infrequently, and they'd be better served trying to get people they can put over as either tougher or highly skilled to fill most of the top spots on a show and they'd be better off.

Now it's obvious since the companies that drew the best were largely out of the United States that as a general rule, some of this isn't necessarily applicable to the United States. But there is always something to learn from a successful product when it is basically successful appealing to the same basic lure buttons all wrestling is aimed at pushing, getting the guy sitting at home to want to purchase a ticket to see a show when it comes to his city.

One could also make the argument because of what is working elsewhere nowadays, that part of the problem with the U.S. scene as far as its problem drawing is a system that has evolved into overreliance on pushing attributes that are less effective in getting people to buy tickets, such as interviews and gimmicks over perceived skill and toughness. Fact is, AAA came to the U.S. and its shows by and large were far more successful, even though appealing only to a small portion of the audience because of the limits of the language barrier and poor exposure, at getting their small portion interested in the product than WWF or WCW, doing a style that supposedly is designed to draw in the United States. Just as an example, let's look at San Jose. If we go under the conclusion that WWFs drawing audience is English speaking and AAA would be Spanish speaking (and in each case that isn't completely accurate since WWF also has spanish language television so if anything that gives them another advantage), then with four times as many people in the market speaking English than Spanish, WWF should draw crowds four times larger. They don't. In fact, it's pretty much even when it comes to attendance and if AAA had its act together, but probably would consistently do better. The reason is either the AAA product is more compelling to its target group, judging from this, probably four times as compelling, or simply newness in the marketplace (although when WWF was new in the same market its crowds weren't larger than AAA's original crowds). The trick is how much is the former and to figure out why.

While there are some very charismatic drawing cards on that list, for the most part that list should pretty well expose the idea of a wrestler being responsible for drawing money on his own to be the fraud that it really is. He needs a strong promotion and that promotion to create the right big show for him to headline. Next time someone tries to knock a wrestler in a weak promotion because he didn't draw money, the best response is to ignore it since it doesn't hold water. Masa Chono, who shouldn't draw money, does because he's with New Japan. Sting, who should, doesn't because he isn't. A wrestling myth bites the dust when it's put under scrutiny.

Let's look at others. A small guy can't draw money. Forgetting the women, that one also needs to be put on the scrap heap. Of the men on the list, 23% are in excess of 270 pounds, 37% between 235-270 and 40% under 235. In other words, the greatest group of big draws are smaller wrestlers rather than even average sized wrestlers. It appears that the look of power is a definite attribute, but being of normal size and power can easily be overcome if you have other traits that draw money. The truism of someone being too small to draw money doesn't hold water, within reason of course, as obviously someone 150 pounds is too small to be on top, but 210 handled correctly in the right position isn't, even as a heel. However, part of the traditional truism does hold water. Faces that draw in general are smaller than the heels. Of the faces on the list, 60% would be of medium size (235-270) while most of the rest would be on the smaller size. On the other hand, 42% of the drawing heels are over 270. However, 28% of the heels that draw money are less than 235 pounds, so dismissing a heel as not being able to draw based on size is a fallacy but having that size is an attribute on the heel side. Most guys over 270 appear to be better off in heel roles, especially monster heel roles if they have the powerful look rather than the old superman face role which seems to be losing popularity. But of course there are

exceptions to every statement (Undertaker and Hashimoto) as well but as a general rule this has proven to be the case.

How about looks? That doesn't appear to mean a thing. Exactly one-third would be classified as good looking, the same percentage as ugly and the rest are either in the middle or wear masks so it doesn't matter. However, when breaking it down to faces and heels, there is the expected difference. Only 21% of drawing heels would be considered good looking, 28% average, 36% ugly and the others are masked. On the face side, 41% are good looking and 27% ugly so the percentages are reversed. A face to draw on top surely doesn't need good looks nor does a heel have to be ugly, but it does seem to help a little.

Age? The vast majority are in their 30s, with about an equal amount in their 20s as in their 40s. It appears the average drawing card is about 35 years old. In other words, the peak year appears to be when someone has been around long enough to establish a name and know the ropes, but still be at the tail end of their athletic prime. Here's one that will surprise a lot of people. It appears that it's better as far as drawing money goes as a face, to be older. Older top faces tend to make better drawing cards because apparently of long-time name recognition and the kind of respect that brings by casual fans who have seen them for years. In many cases, those older top faces were actually heels for most of their career but once past a certain age it seems the only way they can be effective is in a face role. The percentage of both faces and heels that draw in their 20s are almost identical at 28%, so talented young wrestlers on top it seems to make no difference as far as age goes whether they play face or heel. The difference is, faces that draw in their 30s make up 64% of the heels while 50% of the faces, which means that for wrestlers in their 40s to draw money, to be effective they almost have to be faces. The ONLY exception in wrestling to this rule in 1994 was Cien Caras, who is technically a heel but he's cheered by most of the fans anyway when fans are left to their own natural instincts. If we were to throw in big PPV shows on the list and Ric Flair would be added to the post-40 group, we'd find the same thing. He's technically a heel but still cheered by most of the fans if left to their own natural instincts anyway. The older heel stereotype is non-existent as an effective role today. Not one person playing that role was a big draw last year. Today's fans, for whatever reason, seem to get a kick out of older wrestlers who hang in there against the younger guys which also explains the popularity of people like George Foreman and Nolan Ryan in real sports. In a face role, age may not be the negative it is perceived as being for a Hulk Hogan or a Ric Flair, but in a heel role it seems to be close to death.

How much does workrate mean? About 57% of the top draws would be ranked in the top third when it comes to workrate so a good workrate helps. However 35% would be in the bottom third. In other words, being a good worker helps, but it doesn't seem to matter whether one is an average worker or a bad worker. If you've got other important attributes, it doesn't hurt at all to be a below average worker when it comes to drawing power. Bad work really isn't much of a detriment to drawing power if you've got enough of the rest of the package. However, good work clearly helps since perceived ring skill is one of the most important attributes in being a drawing card. For whatever reason, very few of the top drawing cards are average workers. Far more are bad than average. Perhaps those who reach the top based on things other than their work, figure that out, and realize if they've got the rest of the package, it doesn't matter if they have good matches or bad matches because their established name can get a pop anyway and simply take the less physically demanding way out. However, for the most part, those who have made it based on workrate realize that as well, and aren't going to sluff off.

It's the heels that draw the money? That's hard to judge since for every heel that's involved in something that draws, there is a babyface on top who draws the same amount. That saying was pretty well a holdover from the territory days anyway and once Hulk Hogan was drawing big crowds nationally, even that truism that stood the test of time so to speak had to be abandoned in the face of overwhelming in your face evidence. But today there is no way of looking at anything and getting a valid response to if that holds water.

JANUARY 16, 1995

## 1994 WRESTLING OBSERVER AWARDS

The following are the results of the 15th annual Wrestling Observer readership awards along with a listing of the previous winners in the various categories. We had in excess of 700 respondents to the awards this year making it the biggest awards balloting in our history. While I can't say there are a lot of surprises among the winners, this year marks plenty of new faces being mentioned in almost every category and probably more divergent styles are represented this year than any year in the past. The business is changing and where it will end up nobody knows.

### WRESTLER OF THE YEAR

1. TOSHIKI KAWADA (134) 960
2. Sabu (123) 923
3. Ric Flair (71) 616
4. Kenta Kobashi (44) 488
5. Steve Williams (25) 442

### MOST OUTSTANDING WRESTLER

1. KENTA KOBASHI (119) 1,121
2. Sabu (162) 1,009
3. Chris Benoit (95) 993
4. Great Sasuke (75) 626
5. Toshiaki Kawada (33) 566

### BEST BABYFACE

1. ATSUSHI ONITA (298) 2,095
2. Perro Aguayo (121) 1,183
3. Bret Hart (57) 710
4. Hulk Hogan (77) 652
5. The Undertaker (38) 350

### BEST HEEL

1. LOVE MACHINE (416) 2,598
2. Ric Flair (54) 626
3. Vader (58) 616
4. Shane Douglas (45) 496
5. Bob Backlund (46) 488

#### **FEUD OF THE YEAR**

1. GRINGO LOCOS VS. MEXICAN AAA (157) 961
2. Bret Hart vs. Owen Hart (80) 738
3. Misawa & co. vs. Kawada & co. (74) 665
4. Hulk Hogan vs. Ric Flair (66) 649
5. Konnan El Barbaro vs. Perro Aguayo (22) 353

#### **TAG TEAM OF THE YEAR**

1. LOVE MACHINE & EDDY GUERRERO (376) 2,568
2. Mitsuharu Misawa & Kenta Kobashi (88) 926
3. Public Enemy (85) 857
4. Heavenly Bodies (32) 558
5. Etsuko Mita & Mima Shimoda (36) 324

#### **MOST IMPROVED**

1. DIESEL (98) 795
2. Shane Douglas (99) 655
3. Love Machine (67) 409
4. Shinjiro Otani (28) 362
5. Johnny B. Badd (31) 286

#### **BEST ON INTERVIEWS**

1. RIC FLAIR (175) 1,283
2. Shane Douglas (122) 1,215
3. Jim Cornette (62) 708
4. Paul E. Dangerously (62) 501
5. Cactus Jack (49) 472

#### **MOST CHARISMATIC**

1. ATSUSHI ONITA (227) 1,688
2. Ric Flair (124) 918
3. Perro Aguayo (74) 709
4. Hulk Hogan (55) 585
5. Sting (17) 327

#### **BEST TECHNICAL WRESTLER**

1. CHRIS BENOIT (299) 1,815
2. Kenta Kobashi (61) 855
3. Jushin Liger (42) 484
4. Hiroshi Hase (26) 461
5. Manami Toyota (37) 342

#### **BRUISER BRODY MEMORIAL AWARD (BEST BRAWLER)**

1. CACTUS JACK (313) 2,180
2. Sabu (122) 1,151
3. Terry Funk (59) 922
4. Vader (40) 521
5. Stan Hansen (9) 316

#### **BEST FLYING WRESTLER**

1. GREAT SASUKE (411) 2,478
2. Rey Misterio Jr. (152) 2,149
3. Sabu (96) 1,208
4. Jushin Liger (25) 437
5. Manami Toyota (19) 355

#### **MOST OVERRATED**

1. HULK HOGAN (301) 1,859
2. Jim Duggan (33) 597
3. Lex Luger (38) 448
4. The Butcher (39) 355
5. Diesel (26) 317

#### **MOST UNDERRATED**

1. BRIAN PILLMAN (123) 764
2. Chris Benoit (120) 762
3. Al Snow (88) 621
4. 1-2-3 Kid (30) 413
5. Shinjiro Otani (3) 169

#### **BEST PROMOTION**

1. AAA (154) 1,810

2. All Japan Pro Wrestling (201) 1,658

3. Extreme Championship Wrestling (162) 1,187

4. New Japan Pro Wrestling (61) 889

5. All Japan Womens Pro Wrestling (87) 771

#### **BEST WEEKLY TELEVISION SHOW**

1. EXTREME CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING (318) 1,892

2. AAA Lucha Libre (95) 993

3. All Japan Pro Wrestling 30 (85) 973

4. New Japan World Pro Wrestling (35) 768

5. WWF Monday Night Raw (67) 697

#### **MATCH OF THE YEAR**

1. RAZOR RAMON VS. SHAWN MICHAELS 3-20 NEW YORK (125) 984

2. Mitsuharu Misawa vs. Toshiaki Kawada 6-3 Tokyo (136) 945

3. Great Sasuke vs. Wild Pegasus (Chris Benoit) 4-16 Tokyo (99) 928

4. Machine & Guerrero vs. Santo & Octagon 11-6 Los Angeles (85) 799

5. Terry Funk vs. Shane Douglas vs. Sabu 2-5 Philadelphia (48) 508

Honorable Mention: Ric Flair vs. Vader 12-27-93 Charlotte 281, Mitsuharu Misawa & Kenta Kobashi vs. Toshiaki Kawada & Akira Taue 5-21 Sapporo 171, Nasty Boys vs. Cactus Jack & Maxx Payne 4-17 Chicago 157, Jushin Liger vs. Great Sasuke 4-16 Tokyo 154, Cactus Jack & Kevin Sullivan 5-22 Philadelphia 148, Aja Kong vs. Manami Toyota 11-20 Tokyo 147, Akira Hokuto & Kyoko Inoue vs. Manami Toyota & Toshiyo Yamada 12-10-93 Tokyo 124, Mitsuharu Misawa vs. Steve Williams 7-28 Tokyo 109, Great Sasuke vs. Ginsei Shinzaki 4-29 Tokyo 97, Wild Pegasus & Shinjiro Otani vs. Black Tiger (Eddy Guerrero) & Great Sasuke 10-18 Odawara 91, Bret Hart vs. Owen Hart 8-29 Chicago 74, Steve Williams vs. Kenta Kobashi 9-3 Tokyo 74, Bret Hart vs. Owen Hart 3-20 New York 72

#### **ROOKIE OF THE YEAR**

1. MIKEY WHIPPRECK (108) 1,012

2. Jean Paul Levesque (112) 795

3. Bas Rutten (95) 624

4. 911 (45) 579

5. Tamon Honda (74) 505

#### **BEST WRESTLING MANEUVER**

1. GREAT SASUKE SPACE FLYING TIGER DROP 121

2. Eddy Guerrero Frankenstein off Machine's shoulders 113

3. Rey Misterio Jr. Frankenstein off top rope 64

4. Scott Steiner SDD 56

5. Steve Williams backdrop driver 49

#### **MOST DISGUSTING PROMOTIONAL TACTIC**

1. WCW RETIRING RIC FLAIR 169

2. Hulk Hogan and friends taking over WCW 69

3. SMW Gangstas race-baiting angles 51

4. Undertaker death and resurrection angle 49

5. ECW NWA title double-cross 41

#### **READERS PERSONAL FAVORITE WRESTLER**

1. SABU 88

2. Ric Flair 83

3. Shawn Michaels 57

4. Manami Toyota 47

5. Cactus Jack 39

#### **READERS LEAST FAVORITE WRESTLER**

1. HULK HOGAN 370

2. Jim Duggan 32

3. Dave Sullivan 19

4. The Butcher 14

5. Lex Luger 11

#### **BEST BOOKER**

1. PAUL HEYMAN 322

2. Antonio Pena 136

3. Jim Cornette 73

4. Shohei Baba 37

5. Vince McMahon 15

#### **PROMOTER OF THE YEAR**

1. SHOHEI BABA 229

2. Antonio Pena 202

3. Tod Gordon 136



4. Vince McMahon 45

5. Jim Cornette 31

### 1994 RECORD BOOK THE BIGGEST SHOWS OF THE YEAR

#### NEW JAPAN BATTLEFIELD '94 - JANUARY 4

Site: Tokyo Dome

Live attendance: 58,000

Approximate live gate: \$4 million

1. Michiyoshi Ohara & Kuniaki Kobayashi & Great Kabuki (Akihisa Mera) & Shiro Koshinaka & Kengo Kimura (Takashi Kimura) b Manabu Nakanishi & Yuji Nagata & Satoshi Kojima & El Samurai (Osamu Matsuda) & Osamu Kido 12:09 \*\*; 2. Takayuki Iizuka & Akira Nogami b Masashi Aoyagi & Akitoshi Saito 14:07; 3. Brutus Beefcake (Ed Leslie) b Black Cat (Victor Mar) 8:06; 4. Super Strong Machine (Junji Hirata) b Tatsutoshi Goto 8:51; 5. Jushin Liger (Keiichi Yamada) b Tiger Mask (Koji Kanemoto) 14:26 \*\*\*1/4; 6. IWGP tag team title: Hawk (Mike Hegstrand) & Power (Kensuke Sasaki) Warrior b Scott Norton & Hercules Fernandez (Ray Fernandez) to win titles 12:47 -1/2\*; 7. Rick & Scott Steiner (Robert & Scott Rechsteiner) b Hiroshi Hase & Keiji Muto 20:51 \*\*\*\*1/4; 8. Hulk Hogan (Terry Bollea) b Tatsumi Fujinami 13:33 \*1/2; 9. Riki Choshu (Mitsuo Yoshida) b Yoshiaki Fujiwara 9:04 DUD; 10. IWGP hwt title: Shinya Hashimoto b Masa Chono 28:00 \*\*\*; 11. Genichiro Tenryu (Genichiro Shimade) b Antonio Inoki 15:56 \*\*\*\*1/4

#### WWF ROYAL RUMBLE - JANUARY 23

Site: Providence Civic Center

Live attendance: 14,500 sellout

Live gate: \$160,000

Approximate buy rate: 0.9

Approximate PPV revenue: \$2.3 million

Observer poll results: Thumbs up 193 (27.0%), Thumbs down 467 (65.2%), In the middle 56 (7.8%)

Best match: Harts vs. Quebecers 154, Royal Rumble 102

Worst match: Undertaker vs. Yokozuna 227, Royal Rumble 84

1. Tatanka (Chris Chavis) b Bam Bam Bigelow (Scott Bigelow) 8:12 \*3/4; 2. WWF tag team titles: Quebecers (Jacques Rougeau & Pierre Ouellette) b Bret & Owen Hart 16:48 \*\*\*1/4; 3. IC title: Razor Ramon (Scott Hall) b IRS (Lawrence Rotunda) 11:30 \*1/2; 4. WWF title in casket match: Yokozuna (Rodney Anoia) b The Undertaker (Mark Callaway) 14:20 \*; 5. Bret Hart and Lex Luger (Larry Pfohl) tied winning Royal Rumble 55:08 \*\*1/2

#### WCW CLASH OF THE CHAMPIONS - JANUARY 27

Site: Baton Rouge Centroplex

Live attendance: 3,200 (2,000 paid)

Live gate: \$21,000

TV rating: 3.5

Observer poll results: Thumbs up 87 (29.2%), Thumbs down 165 (55.4%), In the middle 46 (15.4%)

Best match: Sting & Flair vs. Vader & Rude 138, Scorpio & Bagwell vs. Orndorff & Roma 26

Worst match: Simmons vs. Ice Train 110, Rhodes vs. Regal 33

1. Too Cold Scorpio (Charles Skaggs) & Marcus Bagwell b Paul Orndorff & Paul Roma (Paul Centopani) 12:39 \*3/4; 2. Ron Simmons b Ice Train (Harold Hoag) 3:32 1/2\*; 3. WCW TV title: Steve Regal (Darren Matthews) d Dustin Rhodes (Dustin Runnels) 15:00 \*1/4; 4. Non-title: Maxx Payne (Darryl Peterson) & Cactus Jack (Michael Foley) b WCW tag champs Nasty Boys Knobs (Brian Yandrisovitz) & Sags (Jerry Segnowich) 6:46 \*1/2; 5. Brian Pillman b Col. Rob Parker (Robert Welch) 5:41 \*\*; 6. Elimination tag match: Ric Flair (Richard Fliehr) & Sting (Steve Borden) b Vader (Leon White) & Rick Rude (Richard Rood) 22:27 \*\*\*\*1/4

#### ECW NIGHT THE LINE WAS CROSSED - FEBRUARY 5

Site: Philadelphia ECW Arena

Live attendance: 900 sellout

Live gate: Unavailable

1. 911 (Al McGill) b Chad Austin DUD; 2. Mr. Hughes (Curtis Hughes) b Sal Bellomo DUD; 3. Dog Collar match: Sandman (Jim Fullington) & Tommy Cairo b Pit Bull Spike (Gary Smith) & Rockin Rebel (Chuck Williams) \*\*\*; 4. Falls count anywhere: Public Enemy Johnny Grunge (Mike Durham) & Rocko Rock (Ted Petty) b Bruise Brothers (Ron & Don Harris) \*\*\*\*1/4; 5. Jimmy Snuka (James Reiher) b Tommy Dreamer (Tom Laughlin) \*3/4; 6. The Sheik (Ed Farhat) & Pat Tanaka b Kevin Sullivan & Tazmaniac (Pete Senerca) \*\*\*1/4; 7. J.T. Smith (John Smith) b Mike Awesome (Mike Alfonso) \*\*1/4; 8. Triangular match: Terry Funk & Sabu (Terry Brunk) & Shane Douglas (Troy Martin) went to 60:00 draw with no falls taken \*\*\*\*1/2

#### SMW SUNDAY BLOODY SUNDAY - FEBRUARY 13

Site: Knoxville City Coliseum

Live attendance: 3,950

Live gate: \$31,800

1. Anthony Michaels b The Hornet (Brian Keyes) \*; 2. Chris Candido (Chris Candito) b Tracy Smothers \*\*\*\*1/4; 3. Mike & Doug Furnas b Tom Prichard & Jimmy Del Rey (James Richland) \*\*\*1/2; 4. Texas death match: Bob Armstrong (Robert James Sr.) b Terry Funk \*\*\*3/4; 5. SMW tag title: Ricky Morton & Robert Gibson (Ruben Kane) b champs Prichard & Del Rey \*3/4; 6. Chain match for SMW title: Dirty White Boy (Tony Anthony) b Brian Lee (Brian Harris) to win title \*\*\*3/4; 7. Cage match: Bruise Brothers b Moondogs (Larry Booker & Nathan ?) \*\*1/2

#### WCW SUPERBRAWL IV - FEBRUARY 20

Site: Albany, GA Civic Center

Live attendance: 7,600 sellout (4,217 paid)

Live gate: \$39,000

Approximate buy rate: 0.5

Approximate PPV revenue: \$1.26 million

Observer poll results: Thumbs up 110 (35.7%), Thumbs down 178 (57.8%), In the middle 20 (6.5%)

Best match: Flair vs. Vader 118, Sting & Pillman & Rhodes vs. Rude & Orndorff & Austin 111

Worst match: Steele vs. Equalizer 202, Harlem Heat vs. Thunder & Lightning 32

1. Harlem Heat (Stevie Ray & Booker Ray) b Thunder (Clark Haines) & Lightning (Jeff Farmer) 9:47 DUD; 2. Jim Steele b The Equalizer (Bill Dannenhauser) 6:31 -\*\*1/2; 3. Terry Taylor (Paul Taylor) b Dallas Page (Page Falkenberg) 11:45 1/2\*; 4. Johnny B. Badd (Marc Mero) b Jimmy Garvin (James Williams) 10:48 DUD; 5. WCW TV title: Steve Regal b Arn Anderson (Marty Lunde) 27:32 1/2\*; 6. WCW tag titles: Cactus Jack & Maxx Payne b champs Nasty Boys via DQ 12:37 \*\*\*; 7. Thundercage match: Sting & Brian Pillman & Dustin Rhodes b Rick Rude & Steve Austin (Steve Williams) & Paul Orndorff 14:36 \*\*\*\*1/4; 8. Thundercage match for WCW title with Boss as referee: Ric Flair b Vader 11:32 \*\*\*1/2

### ALL JAPAN BUDOKAN - MARCH 5

Site: Tokyo Budokan Hall

Live attendance: 16,300

Live gate: Est. \$1 million

1. Satoru Asako b Kentaro Shiga; 2. Al Perez & Barry Horowitz b Dory Funk & Masao Inoue; 3. Dan Kroffat (Phil LaFond) & Doug Furnas b Tamon Honda & Yoshinari Ogawa; 4. Rusher Kimura (Masao Kimura) & Mighty Inoue (Sueo Inoue) & Mitsuo Momota b Haruka Eigen & Masa Fuchi & Ryukaku Izumida; 5. Johnny Ace (John Laurinaitis) & Richard Slinger (Richard Aceslinger) & Rob Van Dam (Rob Szatkowski) b The Patriot (Del Wilkes) & The Eagle (George Hines) & Johnny Gunn (Tom Brandi) \*\*\*; 6. Akira Taue & Toshiaki Kawada b Takao Omori & Jun Akiyama \*\*3/4; 7. Steve Williams b John Nord \*1/2; 8. Mitsuharu Misawa & Kenta Kobashi b Giant Baba (Shohei Baba) & Stan Hansen 35:51 \*\*\*\*1/4

### USWA MONDAY NIGHT MEMPHIS MEMORIES - MARCH 7

Site: Memphis Mid South Coliseum

Live attendance: 7,700

Live gate: \$30,000

1. The Nightmares (Ken Peale & Daniel Burielle) & Skull Von Crush (Vito Lograsso) b Spellbinder (Del Rios) & King Cobra & Jeff Gaylord 8:28 DUD; 2. J.C. Ice (James Crookshanks) DCOR Wolfie D (Kelly Wolfe) 8:12 \*\*\*; 3. Koko Ware (James Ware) b Billy Travis 9:24 \*\*; 4. Tommy Rich (Thomas Richardson) b Jimmy Valiant (James Valen)-DQ 4:00 DUD; 5. USWA tag title: Moondogs b Dr. Frank & Leatherface (Ken Raper) 2:24 DUD; 6. Jerry Lawler & Austin Idol (Dennis McCord) & Brian Christopher (Brian Lawler) b Doug & Eddie (Thomas Gilbert Jr.) Gilbert & Terry Funk-DQ \*\*1/2; 7. Elimination tag match: Lawler & Valiant & Idol & Christopher b Funk & Rich & Gilberts & Ware & Moondog Spot 42:00 \*\*\*1/2

### UFC II - MARCH 11

Site: Denver Mammoth Gardens

Live attendance: 2,000 sellout

Live gate: Unknown

Approximate buy rate: 0.5

Approximate PPV revenue: \$740,000

1. Royce Gracie b Minoki Ichihara 5:06; 2. Patrick Smith b Scott Morris :21; 3. Johnny Rhodes b Fred Ettish 3:08; 4. Renco Parduel b Orlando Weit 1:26; 5. Gracie b Jason DiLucia 1:02; 6. Smith b Rhodes 1:05; 7. Gracie b Parduel 1:29; 8. Gracie b Smith to win tournament 1:16

### AAA/IWC LOS ANGELES SPORTS ARENA - MARCH 12

Site: Los Angeles Sports Arena

Live attendance: 13,852

Live gate: \$238,595

1. Tim Patterson (Tim Fredrichs) & Killer Blond (Louis Mucciolo) & Super Rabbit (Bobby Bradley Jr.) b Chavo (Salvador Guerrero Jr.) & Mando (Armando Guerrero) & Hector Guerrero-DQ 18:57 \*\*3/4; 2. Los Payasos Azul (Raul Mayo Castellanos) & Rojo & Amarillo (Vincente Carbajal) b Misterioso & Torero & Mascara Sagrada-DQ 23:41 \*\*\*; 3. Espectro & Fuerza Guerrera & Jerry Estrada b Rey Misterio Jr. (Oscar Gonzales) & Heavy Metal (Erik Casas) & Winners 22:59 \*\*\*\*; 4. IWC minis championship deciding first champ match: Mascarita Sagrada b Espectrito (Mario Jimenez) 24:45 \*\*\*\*1/2; 5. Octagon & El Hijo del Santo (Jorge Guzman) & Lizmark (Juan Banos) b Love Machine (Art Barr) & Psicosis & La Parka 22:59 \*\*\*3/4; 6. Cage match: Konnan El Barbaro (Charles Ashenoff) b Jake Roberts (Aurelian Smith Jr.) 20:17 \*\*\*

### WWF WRESTLEMANIA X - MARCH 20

Site: New York Madison Square Garden

Live attendance: 18,065 sellout

Live gate: \$960,000

Approximate buy rate: 1.68

Approximate PPV revenue: \$5.2 million

Observer poll results: Thumbs up 492 (79.1%), Thumbs down 69 (11.1%), In the middle 61 (9.8%)

Best match: Michaels vs. Ramon 479, Hart vs. Hart 136

Worst match: Luger vs. Yokozuna 228, Bomb vs. Earthquake 193

1. Owen Hart b Bret Hart 20:26 \*\*\*\*3/4; 2. Bam Bam Bigelow & Luna Vachon (Gertrude Vachon) b Doink (Ray Apollo) & Dink (Tiger Jackson) 6:09 \*3/4; 3. Falls count anywhere: Randy Savage (Randy Poffo) b Crush (Brian Adams) 9:43 \*\*3/4; 4. WWF womens title: Alundra Blayze (Debra Micelli) b Leilani Kai (Patricia Karisma) 3:23 \*1/4; 5. WWF tag title: Men on a Mission Mabel (Nelson Frazier) & Mo (Bobby Horne) b champs Quebecers-COR 7:45 \*1/4; 6. WWF title: Yokozuna b Lex Luger-DQ 14:40 1/2\*; 7. Earthquake (John Tenta) b Adam Bomb (Bryan Clark) :35 DUD; 8. Ladder match IC title: Razor Ramon b Shawn Michaels (Michael Hickenbottom) 18:47 \*\*\*\*\*; 9. WWF title: Bret Hart b Yokozuna to win title 10:36 \*\*1/4

### ALL JAPAN WOMEN WRESTLING QUEENDOM II - MARCH 27

Site: Yokohama Arena

Live attendance: 15,000

Live gate: Approx. \$1 million

1. Japanese jr. title: Candy Okutsu (Tomoko Okutsu) b Rie Tamada 9:03; 2. Little Great Muta b Little Abdullah the Butcher 7:16; 3. Japanese tag title: Miki Handa & Yasha Kurenai (Rumi Yasuda) b Tomoko Watanabe & Kaoru Ito 19:26; 4. Hikari Fukuoka b Chapparita Asari (Masami Watanabe) 14:26; 5. Megumi Kudo & Nurse Nakamura (Rie Nakamura) b Suzuka Minami (Mika Suzuki) & Chikako Shiratori (Chikako Hasegawa) 16:38 \*\*1/2; 6. IWA title: Manami Toyota b Plum Mariko (Mariko Umeda) 20:31; 7. Eagle Sawai (Tomoko Sawai) & Reggie Bennett b Takako Inoue & Yumiko Hotta 13:03; 8. JWP tag titles: Etsuko Mita & Mima Shimoda b Mayumi Ozaki & Cutie Suzuki (Yumi Suzuki) to win titles 20:35; 9. Dynamite Kansai (Chieko Suzuki) b Sakie Hasegawa 16:31 \*\*1/2; 10. All-Pacific title: Kyoko Inoue b Toshiyo Yamada to win title 16:16 \*\*\*1/2; 11. Akira Hokuto (Hisako Uno) & Shinobu Kandori b Aja Kong (Erica Shishido) & Bull Nakano (Keiko Nakano) 35:13 \*\*\*\*1/2

#### SMW BLUEGRASS BRAWL - APRIL 1

Site: Pikeville, KY

Live attendance: 1,850

Live gate: \$11,000

1. Killer Kyle (Mark Kyle) b Anthony Michaels 1/2\*; 2. Lance Storm (Lance Evers) b Steven Dunn (Steve Doll) \*\*; 3. Storm b Timothy Well (Mike Smith); 4. Ladder match: Tracy Smothers b Chris Candido \*\*\*\*1/2; 5. Handicap match: Jim Cornette & Bruiser Bedlam (Johnny K-9) b Bob Armstrong \*; 6. Dirty White Boy & Dirty White Girl (Kimberly Wolser-Anthony) b Brian Lee & Tammy Fytch (Tamara Sytch) \*\*1/2; 7. Loser leaves town cage match: Ricky Morton & Robert Gibson b Tom Prichard & Jimmy Del Rey \*\*\*\*1/2

#### UWFI SHOOTFIGHTING II - APRIL 3

Site: Osaka Castle Hall

Live attendance: 14,000

Live gate: Unknown

Approximate buy rate: Less than 0.1

Approximate PPV revenue: Unavailable

Observer poll results: Thumbs up 49 (67.1%), Thumbs down 14 (19.2%), In the middle 10 (13.7%)

Best match: Takada vs. Yamazaki 20, Albright vs. Scott 19

Worst match: Allen vs. Tamura 33, Berkovich vs. Lydick 12

1. Kiyoshi Tamura b Badnews Allen (Allen Coage) 6:11; 2. Jean Lydick b Vladimir Berkovich 9:40; 3. Yoji Anjo b Victor Zangiev 5:54; 4. Masahito Kakiyama b Dan Severn 10:39; 5. Gary Albright b Billy Scott 2:11; 6. Super Vader (Leon White) b Salman Hashimikov (didn't air); 7. Nobuhiko Takada b Kazuo Yamazaki 7:17

#### NEW JAPAN SUPER J CUP - APRIL 16

Site: Tokyo Sumo Hall

Live attendance: 11,500 sellout

Live gate: Approx. \$570,000

One-night tournament: 1. Gedo (Keiti Akiyama) b Dean Malenko (Dean Simon) \*\*\*3/4; 2. Super Delfin (Hiro Wakida) b Shinjiro Otani \*\*\*\*; 3. Black Tiger (Eddy Guerrero) b Taka Michinoku (Takao Yoshida) \*\*\*\*; 4. El Samurai b Masayoshi Motegi \*\*\*1/2; 5. Ricky Fuji (Masanori Morimura) b Negro Casas (Jose Casas) \*\*\*1/4; 6. Jushin Liger b Hayabusa (Eiji Ezaki) \*\*\*\*; 7. Gedo b Delfin \*\*\*3/4; 8. Wild Pegasus (Chris Benoit) b Tiger \*\*\*\*; 9. Great Sasuke (Masanori Murakawa) b Samurai \*\*\*\*1/2; 10. Liger b Fuji \*\*\*; 11. Pegasus b Gedo \*\*\*1/2; 12. Sasuke b Liger \*\*\*\*3/4; 13. Pegasus b Sasuke to win tournament \*\*\*\*

#### ALL JAPAN CHAMPION CARNIVAL FINAL - APRIL 16

Site: Tokyo Budokan Hall

Live attendance: 16,300 sellout

Live gate: Approx. \$1 million

1. Satoru Asako b Kento Shiga; 2. Yoshinari Ogawa b Tsuyoshi Kikuchi; 3. Rusher Kimura & Mighty Inoue & Mitsuo Momota b Masao Inoue & Haruka Eigen & Masa Fuchi; 4. Dan Kroffat & Doug Furnas b John Nord & The Eagle; 5. Johnny Ace b Tamon Honda; 6. Akira Taue b Johnny Smith (John Hindley); 7. Mitsuharu Misawa & Kenta Kobashi & Jun Akiyama b Giant Baba & Stan Hansen & Takao Omori 24:19; 8. Champion Carnival final: Toshiaki Kawada b Steve Williams to win tournament 25:48 \*\*\*\*1/2

#### WCW SPRING STAMPEDE - APRIL 17

Site: Rosemont Horizon

Live attendance: 12,200 (9,000 paid)

Live gate: \$107,000

Approximate buy rate: 0.5

Approximate PPV revenue: \$1.26 million

Observer poll results: Thumbs up 409 (90.5%), Thumbs down 12 (2.7%), In the middle 31 (6.9%)

Best match: Nasty Boys vs. Jack & Payne 171, Flair vs. Steamboat 153

Worst match: Badd vs. Page 178, Austin vs. Muta 38

1. Johnny B. Badd b Dallas Page 5:55 \*\*1/4; 2. WCW TV title: Steve Regal d Brian Pillman 15:00 \*\*3/4; 3. Street fight: Nasty Boys b Cactus Jack & Maxx Payne \*\*\*\*1/2; 4. U.S. title: Steve Austin b Great Muta (Keiji Muto)-DQ 16:29 \*\*3/4; 5. WCW International title: Sting b Rick Rude to win title 13:09 \*\*; 6. Bunkhouse Buck (Jimmy Golden) b Dustin Rhodes 14:17 \*\*\*\*; 7. Vader b The Boss (Ray Traylor) 9:17 \*\*\*1/2; 8. WCW title: Ric Flair d Rick Steamboat (double pin finish) 32:21 \*\*\*\*1/4

#### AAA TRIPLEMANIA II-A - APRIL 26

Site: Aguascalientes Baseball stadium

Live attendance: 9,500

Live gate: \$100,000

1. Rey Misterio (Miguel Lopez) & Rey Misterio Jr. & Winners b Tony Arce (Ysidro Arce) & Vulcano & Rocco Valente (Francisco Arce) \*\*\*\*;

2. Minis: Mascara Sagrada & Octagoncito & Super Munequito b Espectrito & Jerrito Estrada & Fuercita Guerrera-DQ \*\*\*; 3. El Satanico (Daniel Lopez) & Espectro & Psicosis b Lizmark & Lizmark Jr. & Tinieblas Jr. \*\*\*1/2; 4. Fuerza Guerrera & Juventud Guerrera & Misterioso b Latin Lover (Victor Resendez) & Volador (Remo Banda) & El Mexicano \*\*\*1/2; 5. Konnan El Barbaro & Mascara Sagrada & Tiger Mask (Koji Kanemoto) b La Parka & Blue Panther & Fishman \*\*\*3/4; 6. Mexican trios titles: Los Payasos b Cien Caras (Carmelo Reyes) & Mascara Ano 2000 (Jesus Reyes) & Universo 2000 to win titles \*\*\*1/2; 7. El Hijo del Santo & Octagon & Perro Aguayo (Pedro Aguayo) b Love Machine & Eddy Guerrero & Black Cat-DQ \*\*\*\*; 8. Hair vs. hair: Heavy Metal b Jerry Estrada \*\*\*

## NEW JAPAN WRESTLING DONTAKU - MAY 1

Site: Fukuoka Dome

Live attendance: 45,000

Live gate: Unknown

1. Satoshi Kojima b Yuji Nagata 11:21; 2. Tokimitsu Ishizawa & El Samurai b Shinjiro Otani & Tatsuhiro Takaiwa 13:48; 3. Akira Nogami & Takayuki Iizuka & Osamu Kido b Akitoshi Saito & Michiyoshi Ohara & Tatsutoshi Goto 14:06; 4. Kuniaki Kobayashi & Great Kabuki & Kengo Kimura b Norio Honaga & Hiro Saito & Shinichi Nakano 8:39; 5. El Gigante (Jorge Gonzalez) b Tadao Yasuda 3:51 -\*; 6. Jushin Liger d Satoru Sayama 10:00 -\*; 7. Shiro Koshinaka b Yoshiaki Yatsu 12:16; 8. IWGP tag titles: Hawk & Power Warrior b Rick & Scott Steiner 15:27; 9. WCW International title: Rick Rude b Sting to regain title 22:48 \*\*\*; 10. Masa Chono b Yoshiaki Fujiwara 8:08 DUD; 11. Riki Choshu b Hiroshi Hase 10:56 \*\*3/4; 12. IWGP hwt title: Shinya Hashimoto b Tatsumi Fujinami to regain title 6:04 \*\*; 13. Antonio Inoki b Great Muta 20:12 \*\*\*1/4

## FMW ANNUAL STADIUM SHOW - MAY 5

Site: Kawasaki Baseball Stadium

Live attendance: 52,000 sellout

Live gate: \$2.1 million

1. Tetsuhiro Kuroda b Gosaku Goshogawara 9:28; 2. Battle Ranger (Yukihiro Ueno) & Koji Nakagawa & Masato Tanaka b Great Sasuke & Hanzo Nakajima (Kazumichi Nakajima) & Shiryu (Kazuhiro Kayashi) 18:49; 3. Combat Toyoda & Crusher Maedomari (Yoshika Maedomari) & Shark Tsuchiya (Eriko Tsuchiya) b Eagle Sawai & Noriyo Tateno & Mizuki Endo 14:44; 4. Sambo Asako (Fumihiro Asako) & Mr. Gannosuke b Goro Tsurumi (Takao Tanaka) & Hideki Hosaka 12:24; 5. Kick boxing vs. wrestling: Katsuji Ueda b Katsutoshi Niiyama 1:43 of round three; 6. Sabu (Terry Brunk) & Damian b Dr. Luther (Len St. Clair) & Yone Genjin (Akihiro Yonekawa) 15:14; 7. WWA & Independent womens title: Megumi Kudo b Yumiko Hotta 16:48; 8. Big Titan (Rick Bogner) & The Gladiator (Mike Alfonso) & Ricky Fuji b Gedo & Jado (Shoji Akiyoshi) & Hiromichi Fuyuki 15:06; 9. Terry Funk b The Sheik (Ed Farhat) 5:59; 10. World Brass Knux tag title: Mr. Pogo (Tetsuo Sekigawa) & Hisakatsu Oya (Kennichi Oya) b Tarzan Goto (Masaji Goto) & Mitsuhiro Matsunaga 16:38; 11. No rope explosive barbed wire street fight match: Genichiro Tenryu b Atsushi Onita 23:55

## AAA TRIPLEMANIA II-B - MAY 15

Site: Zapopan Benito Juarez Arena

Live attendance: 11,200

Live gate: Est. \$175,000

1. Giro & Colorado & Torero b Fantasma de la Quebrada Jr. & Marabunta & Auillido 13:23 \*\*1/4; 2. Latin Lover & Angel Azteca & Fantasma b Maremoto & Terremoto & Hecatombe 10:13 \*\*\*1/2; 3. Minis parejas incredibles match: Mascara Sagrada & Jerrito Estrada b Espectrito & Micro Konnan-DQ 10:11 \*3/4; 4. Misterioso & Fuerza Guerrera & Juventud Guerrera b Rey Misterio & Rey Misterio Jr. & Volador 17:23 \*\*\*\*; 5. Los Payasos b Gran Hamada (Hiraoki Hamada) & Shu El Guerrero & Scorpio Jr. (Rafael Nunez Jr.) 15:07 \*\*\*1/4; 6. Jushin Liger & Octagon & El Hijo del Santo & Tiger Mask b La Parka & Psicosis & Blue Panther & Eddy Guerrero 23:22 \*\*\*\*1/2; 7. Mask vs. Mask: Mascara Sagrada b Black Cat 29:04 \*\*\*\*3/4; 8. Konnan El Barbaro & Perro Aguayo & Cien Caras b Jake Roberts & Love Machine & Miguel Perez 17:46 \*\*\*\*

## SMW VOLUNTEER SLAM '94 - MAY 20

Site: Knoxville City Coliseum

Live attendance: 2,000

Live gate: \$15,000

1. Tracy Smothers b Kendo the Samurai (Tim Horner) \*\*1/2; 2. Lance Storm & Chris Jericho (Chris Irvine) b Steven Dunn & Timothy Well \*\*\*; 3. SMW tag titles: Brian Lee & Chris Candido b Ricky Morton & Robert Gibson \*\*\*\*; 4. Bruiser Bedlam b Randy Savage \*\*1/4; 5. SMW title: Jake Roberts NC Dirty White Boy \*\*1/2

## WCW SLAMBOREE '94 - MAY 22

Site: Philadelphia Civic Center

Live attendance: 4,000 (2,700 paid)

Live gate: \$53,000

Approximate buy rate: 0.48

Approximate PPV revenue: \$1.21 million

Observer poll results: Thumbs up 214 (65.4%), Thumbs down 61 (18.7%), In the middle 52 (15.9%)

Best match: Nasty Boys vs. Jack & Sullivan 245, Funk vs. Blanchard 16

Worst match: Austin vs. Badd 65, Rhodes vs. Buck 62

1. U.S. title: Steve Austin b Johnny B. Badd 16:12 \*\*1/4; 2. Terry Funk DDQ Tully Blanchard 7:15 \*\*\*1/2; 3. Larry Zbyszko (Larry Whistler) b Steve Regal 11:30 \*\*1/2; 4. Bullrope match: Dustin Rhodes b Bunkhouse Buck 12:47 \*1/2; 5. WCW title: Ric Flair b Barry Windham 13:21 \*\*1/2; 6. WCW tag team titles in Broad Street Bully match: Cactus Jack & Kevin Sullivan b Nasty Boys 9:36 \*\*\*\*1/2; 7. WCW International title: Sting b Vader to become champion (Rude left promotion as champion) 13:54 \*\*\*1/4

## JWP ARIAKE COLISEUM - MAY 22

Site: Tokyo Ariake Coliseum

Live attendance: 10,700 (heavily papered)

Live gate: Unknown

1. Kumiko Maekawa & Rie Tamada b Hiroumi Yagi & Fusayo Nouchi 15:23; 2. Boirshoi Kid (Masami Watanabe) d Commando Boirshoi

10:00; 3. Kyoko Inoue b Candy Okutsu 15:31; 4. Cutie Suzuki b Takako Inoue 19:09; 5. Devil Masami (Masami Yoshida) & Bull Nakano b Sakie Hasegawa & Hikari Fukuoka 28:54; 6. Chigusa Nagayo b Mayumi Ozaki 27:02; 7. WWWA title: Aja Kong b Dynamite Kansai 22:03

### AAA TRIPLEMANIA II-C - MAY 27

Site: El Toreo en Tijuana

Live attendance: 18,000

Live gate: est. \$200,000

1. Super Amigo & El Puma & Despredator b My Flowers (Saul Castillo) & Pimpinela Escarlata (Florencio Diaz) & Rudy Reyna 12:37 1/2\*; 2. Rambo (Jose Luis Mendieta) & Magnate & Espanto Jr. (Miguel Angel Cisneros) b Winners & Super Calo & Solar 13:09 \*\*\*; 3. Rey Misterio & Rey Misterio Jr. & Torero b Fuerza Guerrera & Fishman & Pirata Morgan (Pedro Ortiz) 16:19 \*\*\*1/2; 4. Volador & Tinieblas Jr. & Lizmark Jr. b Love Machine & Miguel Perez & Misterioso-DQ 10:53 \*\*\*\*; 5. Blue Panther won Mexican middleweight title from Octagon via injury forfeit, no match took place; 6. Perro Aguayo & Lizmark & Mascara Sagrada & El Hijo del Santo b La Parka & Psicosis & Black Cat & El Satanico 20:23 \*\*\*3/4; 6. Cage match: Cien Caras & Mascara Ano 2000 & Universo 2000 b Los Payasos \*1/4; 7. Hair vs. hair: Konnan El Barbaro b Jake Roberts 15:28 \*

### ALL JAPAN BUDOKAN HALL - JUNE 3

Site: Tokyo Budokan Hall

Live attendance: 16,300 sellout

Live gate: Approx. \$1 million

1. Tsuyoshi Kikuchi b Masao Inoue; 2. Tommy Rogers (Thomas Couch) & Bobby Fulton (James Hines) b Kentaro Shiga & Yoshinari Ogawa; 3. Abdullah the Butcher (Larry Shreve) & Giant Kimala II (Benjamin Peacock) b Tom Prichard & Jimmy Del Rey DUD; 4. Giant Baba & Rusher Kimura & Mitsuo Momota b Mighty Inoue & Haruka Eigen & Masa Fuchi; 5. Kenta Kobashi & Jun Akiyama b Akira Taue & Tamon Honda \*\*\*\*; 6. Steve Williams & Johnny Ace b Stan Hansen & Takao Omori \*\*1/4; 7. Triple crown: Mitsuharu Misawa b Toshiaki Kawada 35:50 \*\*\*\*\*

### UWFI SHOOTFIGHTING III - JUNE 10 (AIR DATE 11/11)

Site: Tokyo Budokan Hall

Live attendance: 16,500 sellout

Live gate: Approx: \$1.15 million

Approximate buy rate: 0.12

Approximate PPV revenue: \$161,000

Observer poll results: Thumbs up 120 (98.4%), Thumbs down 2 (1.6%)

Best match: Takada vs. Albright 51, Nelson & Lydick vs. Sakuraba & Kakahara 32

Worst match: Burton vs. Kanehara 22, Scott vs. Takayama 21

1. Hiromitsu Kanehara b Tom Burton; 2. Billy Scott b Yoshihiro Takayama; 3. Steve Nelson & Jean Lydick b Kazushi Sakuraba &

Masahito Kakahara; 4. Naoki Sano b Tatsuo Nakano (didn't air); 5. Salman Hashimikov & Victor Zangiev b Yoji Anjyo & Kazuo Yamazaki (didn't air); Best in the world '94 semifinals: 6. Super Vader b Kiyoshi Tamura (didn't air); 7. Nobuhiko Takada b Gary Albright

### WWF KING OF THE RING - JUNE 19

Site: Baltimore Arena

Live attendance: 12,000 sellout

Live gate: \$170,000

Approximate buy rate: 0.73

Approximate PPV revenue: \$1.85 million

Observer poll results: Thumbs up 81 (18.0%), Thumbs down 281 (62.6%), In the middle 87 (19.4%)

Best match: Kid vs. Owen Hart 167, Bret Hart vs. Diesel 110

Worst match: IRS vs. Mabel 138, Lawler vs. Piper 103

1. Razor Ramon b Bam Bam Bigelow 8:24 \*3/4; 2. IRS b Mabel 5:38 1/2\*; 3. Owen Hart b Tatanka 8:18 \*\*\*1/4; 4. 1-2-3 Kid (Sean Waltman) b Jeff Jarrett 4:39 \*\*\*1/4; 5. WWF title: Diesel (Kevin Nash) b Bret Hart (champ)-DQ 22:51 \*\*\*3/4; 6. Ramon b IRS 5:13; 7. Owen Hart b Kid 3:37 \*\*\*1/4; 8. WWF tag title: Head Shrinkers (Samula Anoaia & Solofa Fatu) b Yokozuna & Crush 9:31 \*1/2; 9. King of Ring tournament finals: Owen Hart b Ramon 6:35 \*\*; 10. Roddy Piper (Roderick Toombs) b Jerry Lawler 12:30 \*

### WCW CLASH OF THE CHAMPIONS - JUNE 23

Site: Charleston, SC

Live attendance: 6,700 (4,044 paid)

Live gate: \$42,000

TV rating: 3.0

Observer poll results: Thumbs up 136 (47.7%), Thumbs down 107 (37.5%), In the middle 42 (14.7%)

Best match: Flair vs. Sting 158, Nasty Boys vs. Jack & Sullivan 30

Worst match: Angel vs. Slazenger 108, Austin vs. Badd 31

1. WCW tag titles: Cactus Jack & Kevin Sullivan b Nasty Boys 10:35 \*3/4; 2. Guardian Angel (Ray Traylor) b Tex Slazenger (Dennis Knight) 1:44 DUD; 3. WCW TV title: Steve Regal b Larry Zbyszko to regain title 9:25 \*1/4; 4. U.S. title: Johnny B. Badd b (champ) Steve Austin-DQ 10:25 \*3/4; 5. WCW International and World title unification match: Ric Flair b Sting to become double champion 17:17 \*\*\*1/2

### LLPW BIGGEST SHOW - JULY 14

Site: Tokyo Coliseum

Live attendance: 8,300

Live gate: Unknown

1. Michiko Omukai b Chapparita Asari; 2. Mizuki Endo & Mikiko Futagami b Tomoko Watanabe & Rie Tamada; 3. Rumi Kazama (Rumi Saito) & Carol Midori (Midori Saito) & Michiko Nagashima b Miwa Sato & Yukie Nabeno & Nurse Nakamura; 4. UWA tag team titles: Etsuko Mita & Mima Shimoda b Miki Handa & Jen Yukari (Yukari Osawa); 5. Megumi Kudo b Yasha Kurenai; 6. Harley Saito (Sumiko Saito) & Noriyo Tateno b Kyoko Inoue & Takako Inoue; 7. Combat Toyoda b Eagle Sawai; 8. Chain death match: Bull Nakano b Shinobu Kandori 22:36

#### WCW BASH AT THE BEACH - JULY 17

Site: Orlando Arena

Live attendance: 14,000 sellout (9,111 paid)

Live gate: \$140,000

Approximate PPV buy rate: 1.02

Approximate PPV revenue: \$2.58 million

Observer poll results: Thumbs up 147 (46.7%), Thumbs down 91 (28.9%), In the middle 77 (24.4%)

Best match: Flair vs. Hogan 107, Steamboat vs. Austin 102

Worst match: Jack & Sullivan vs. Roma & Orndorff 121, Regal vs. Badd 46

1. WCW TV title: Steve Regal b Johnny B. Badd 10:40 \*\*1/2; 2. Vader b Guardian Angel-DQ 7:58 \*\*1/2; 3. Terry Funk & Bunkhouse Buck b Dustin Rhodes & Arn Anderson 11:15 \*\*\*; 4. U.S. title: Steve Austin b Ricky Steamboat (Richard Blood) 20:10 \*\*\*3/4; 5. WCW tag titles: Paul Orndorff & Paul Roma b Cactus Jack & Kevin Sullivan to win titles 20:11 1/2\*; 6. WCW title: Hulk Hogan b Ric Flair to win title 21:50 \*\*\*1/4

#### ALL JAPAN BUDOKAN HALL - JULY 28

Site: Tokyo Budokan Hall

Live attendance: 16,300 sellout

Live gate: Est. \$1 million

1. Masao Inoue b Kento Shiga; 2. Yoshinari Ogawa & Mitsuo Momota & Rusher Kimura b Ryukaku Izumida & Mighty Inoue & Haruka Eigen; 3. Abdullah the Butcher & Giant Kimala II b Tamon Honda & Satoru Asako; 4. Terry Gordy & Richard Slinger & Kurt Beyer b Tom Zenk & Johnny Smith & The Eagle; 5. Jun Akiyama & Takao Omori b Dan Kroffat & Doug Furnas; 6. Toshiaki Kawada & Akira Taue & Masa Fuchi b Giant Baba & Kenta Kobashi & Tsuyoshi Kikuchi 22:42 \*\*\*1/2; 7. Triple Crown: Steve Williams b Mitsuharu Misawa to win title 27:39 \*\*\*\*3/4

#### SMW NIGHT OF THE LEGENDS - AUGUST 5

Site: Knoxville City Coliseum

Live attendance: 5,000 (4,400 paid)

Live gate: \$40,000

1. Chris Walker b Richard Slinger \*; 2. Doug Furnas b Killer Kyle \*1/2; 3. Bob Orton & Dick Slater DDQ Ron Garvin (Roger Barnes) & Mongolian Stomper (Archie Gouldie) \*\*\*; 4. SMW tag titles: Ricky

Morton & Robert Gibson b Brian Lee & Chris Candido to win titles \*\*\*3/4; 5. Street fight: Lance Storm & Chris Jericho b Tom Prichard & Jimmy Del Rey \*\*\*1/2; 6. SMW title: Dirty White Boy b Terry Gordy-DQ 1/2\*; 7. Coward waves the flag match: Road Warrior Hawk (Mike Hegstrand) & Bob Armstrong & Tracy Smothers b Dory Funk & Terry Funk & Bruiser Bedlam \*\*\*\*

#### UWFI BEST IN THE WORLD '94 FINALS - AUGUST 18

Site: Tokyo Budokan Hall

Live attendance: 16,500 sellout

Live gate: Est. \$1.15 million

1. Badnews Allen b Hiromitsu Kanehara; 2. Yoshihiro Takayama b Mark Silver; 3. Kazushi Sakuraba & Masahito Kakihara b Billy Scott & Jean Lydick; 4. Salman Hashimikov b Yuko Miyato; 5. Kazuo Yamazaki b Tatsuo Nakano; 6. Yoji Anjyo & Naoki Sano b Vladimir Berkovich & Victor Zangiev; 7. Tournament third place match: Gary Albright b Kiyoshi Tamura; 8. Tournament final & UWFI world hwt title match: Super Vader b Nobuhiko Takada to win tournament and title

#### WCW CLASH OF THE CHAMPIONS - AUGUST 24

Site: Cedar Rapids Five Seasons Center

Live attendance: 4,200 (3,400 paid)

Live gate: \$40,000

TV rating: 4.5

Observer poll results: Thumbs up 149 (31.4%), Thumbs down 228 (48.1%), In the middle 97 (20.5%)

Best match: Steamboat vs. Austin 232, Flair vs. Hogan 73

Worst match: Inoki vs. Regal 165, Flair vs. Hogan 71

1. Non-title: Nasty Boys b (WCW tag champs) Paul Orndorff & Paul Roma 9:34 \*1/2; 2. U.S. title: Rick Steamboat b Steve Austin to win title 16:05 \*\*\*3/4; 3. Dusty Rhodes (Virgil Runnels) & Dustin Rhodes b Terry Funk & Bunkhouse Buck-DQ 7:27 \*\*1/2; 4. Non-title: Antonio Inoki b (WCW TV champ) Steve Regal 8:42 DUD; 5. WCW title: Ric Flair b Hulk Hogan (champ)-COR 14:27 \*\*\*\*1/2

#### ALL JAPAN WOMEN AT BUDOKAN - AUGUST 24

Site: Tokyo Budokan Hall

Live attendance: 15,560 sellout

Live gate: Est. \$1 million

1. Suzuka Minami & Rie Tamada & Tomoko Watanabe & Chapparita Asari b Hikari Fukuoka & Commando Boirshoi & Fusayo Nouchi & Hiroumi Yagi 15:04 \*\*\*1/2; 2. Little Frankie b Tsunokake 1/2\*; 3. Kick boxing shooting match: Kyoko Kamikaze b Kumiko Maekawa; 4. Eagle Sawai & Carol Midori b Reggie Bennett & Kaoru Ito 13:40 \*\*\*; 5. Megumi Kudo b Infernal Kaoru (Kaoru Maeda) 13:43 \*\*\*; 6. UWA tag titles: Etsuko Mita & Mima Shimoda b Harley Saito & Jen Yukari 12:49 \*\*\*1/2; 7. Takako Inoue & Cutie Suzuki b Candy Okutsu & Devil

Masami 17:15 \*\*\*; 8. Chigusa Nagayo & Toshiyo Yamada b Sakie Hasegawa & Mariko Yoshida 16:08 \*\*\*3/4; 9. All Pacific & IWA title unification match: Manami Toyota (IWA) b Kyoko Inoue (Pacific) 23:23 \*\*\*\*1/2; 10. Elimination match: Dynamite Kansai & Yumiko Hotta b Akira Hokuto & Aja Kong 24:39 \*\*\*\*1/2

#### ECW/NWA TOURNAMENT - AUGUST 27

Site: Philadelphia ECW Arena

Live attendance: 750

Live gate: Unknown

1. Dean Malenko b Osamu Nishimura \*\*1/4; 2. 911 b Doink the Clown (Matt Osborne) 1/4\*; 3. Shane Douglas b Tazmaniac \*\*\*; 4. Too Cold Scorpio b Chris Benoit \*\*\*\*1/4; 5. Douglas b Malenko \*\*3/4; 6. Scorpio b 911-COR \*; 7. ECW tag title: Cactus Jack & Mikey Whippreck (John Watson) b Public Enemy Johnny Grunge & Rocko Rock to win titles \*\*\*1/2; 8. Douglas b Scorpio to win tournament \*\*\*\*1/4

#### FMW SUMMER SPECTACULAR - AUGUST 28

Site: Osaka Castle Hall

Live attendance: 15,382 sellout

Live gate: Unknown

1. Katsutoshi Niiyama & Koji Nakagawa & Tetsuhiro Kuroda b Battle Ranger & Masato Tanaka & Gosaku Goshogawara; 2. Texas death match: Crusher Maedomari & Shark Tsuchiya & Tsuppari Mack b Miwa Sato & Megumi Kudo & Nurse Nakamura; 3. RMW North American title: Ricky Fuji b Mach Hayato; 4. Dr. Luther & Dr. Hannibal (Steve Gillespie) b Great Sasuke & Damian; 5. WWA & Independent womens title: Yukie Nabeno b Combat Toyoda to win both titles; 6. Mr. Gannsouke b Sambo Asako; 7. Hayabusa b Sabu; 8. The Gladiator b Big Titan; 9. Street fight death match: Mr. Pogo b Mitsuhiro Matsunaga; 10. Tarzan Goto b Hisakatsu Oya 25:04; 11. Electrified explosive barbed wire barricade double hell match: Atsushi Onita b Masashi Aoyagi

#### WWF SUMMER SLAM '94 - AUGUST 29

Site: Chicago United Center

Live attendance: 23,000 sellout (19,500 paid)

Live gate: \$386,000

Approximate PPV buy rate: 1.25

Approximate PPV revenue: \$3.56 million

Observer poll results: Thumbs up 152 (42.1%), Thumbs down 151 (41.8%), In the middle 58 (16.1%)

Best match: Hart vs. Hart 224, Blayze vs. Nakano 44

Worst match: Undertaker vs. Undertaker 206, Jarrett vs. Mabel 70

1. Bam Bam Bigelow & IRS b Head Shrinkers-DQ 7:20 \*1/2; 2. WWF womens title: Alundra Blayze b Bull Nakano 8:18 \*\*\*1/4; 3. IC title: Razor Ramon b Diesel to win title 15:02 \*\*3/4; 4. Tatanka b Lex Luger 6:02 \*\*; 5. Jeff Jarrett b Mabel 5:55 3/4\*; 6. Cage match for WWF title: Bret Hart b Owen Hart 32:22 \*\*\*\*\*; 7. Undertaker b Evil Undertaker (Brian Harris) 9:10 -\*

#### ALL JAPAN BUDOKAN HALL - SEPTEMBER 3

Site: Tokyo Budokan Hall

Live attendance: 16,300 sellout

Live gate: Est \$1.1 million

1. Mighty Inoue b Kentaro Shiga; 2. Chris & Mark Youngblood (Chris & Mark Romero) b Satoru Asako & Tsuyoshi Kikuchi; 3. Masao Inoue & Mitsuo Momota & Rusher Kimura b Ryukaku Izumida & Haruka Eigen & Masa Fuchi; 4. The Eagle & The Falcon (Steven James) & Doug Furnas b Ricky Santana (Aldo Ortiz) & Johnny Smith & Johnny Ace, 5. PWF jr hwt title: Dan Kroffat b Yoshinari Ogawa \*\*\*1/2; 6. Stan Hansen b Jun Akiyama \*\*\*1/2; 7. Mitsuharu Misawa & Giant Baba & Tamon Honda b Toshiaki Kawada & Akira Taue & Takao Omori 30:59 \*\*\*1/4; 8. Triple Crown: Steve Williams b Kenta Kobashi 41:23 \*\*\*\*3/4

#### UFC III - SEPTEMBER 9

Site: Charlotte

Live attendance: 2,000 sellout

Live gate: Unknown

Approximate buy rate: 0.65

Approximate PPV revenue: \$975,000

1. Keith Hackney b Emmanuel Yarborough 2:03; 2. Ken Shamrock b Christophe Leninger 4:53; 3. Harold Howard b Roland Payne :39; 4. Royce Gracie b Kimo (Kimo Leopoldo); 5. Shamrock b Felix Lee Mitchell; 6. Steve Jenum b Howard to win tournament

#### WCW FALL BRAWL - SEPTEMBER 18

Site: Roanoke Civic Center

Live attendance: 6,500 (5,200 paid)

Live gate: \$61,000

Approximate buy rate: 0.53

Approximate PPV revenue: \$1.39 million

Observer poll results: Thumbs up 59 (25.2%), Thumbs down 134 (57.2%), In the middle 41 (17.5%)

Best match: Sting vs. Vader 139, War Games 38

Worst match: Austin vs. Duggan 151, Sullivan vs. Jack 10

1. WCW TV title: Johnny B. Badd b Steve Regal to win title 11:08 \*\*1/2; 2. Loser leaves town: Kevin Sullivan b Cactus Jack \*\*1/4; 3. U.S. title: Jim Duggan b Steve Austin to win title :35 DUD; 4. WCW tag titles: Paul Orndorff & Paul Roma b Marcus Bagwell & The Patriot 12:54 \*\*1/4; 5. Vader b Guardian Angel 7:04 \*3/4; 6. Vader b Sting via knockdown after time ran out 23:18 \*\*\*3/4; 7. War Games: Dusty & Dustin Rhodes & Nasty Boys b Terry Funk & Bunkhouse Buck & Arn Anderson & Rob Parker 19:05 \*\*\*\*1/4

#### NEW JAPAN IN YOKOHAMA - SEPTEMBER 23

Site: Yokohama Arena

Live attendance: 17,000 sellout

Live gate: Est. \$1.5 million

1. Satoshi Kojima b Yuji Nagata; 2. Akira Nogami & Takayuki Iizuka b Hiro Saito & Norio Honaga; 3. 2 on 3: El Gigante & Black Tiger b El Samurai & Tadao Yasuda & Tokimitsu Ishizawa; 4. Gran Hamada b Shinjiro Otani; 5. Yoshiaki Fujiwara b Jushin Liger; 6. Rick & Scott Steiner b Wild Pegasus & Scott Norton; 7. Tatsumi Fujinami & Hiroshi Hase b Riki Choshu & Manabu Nakanishi; 8. Masa Chono b Great Muta \*1/2; 9. IWGP hwt title: Shinya Hashimoto b Power Warrior \*\*; 10. Antonio Inoki b Wilhelm Ruska

#### NEW JAPAN IN CASTLE HALL - SEPTEMBER 27

Site: Osaka Castle Hall

Live attendance: 11,500

Live gate: Unknown

1. Norio Honaga b Gran Hamada; 2. Black Tiger b El Samurai; 3. Scott Norton & Takayuki Iizuka & Akira Nogami b El Gigante & Tadao Yasuda & Manabu Nakanishi; 4. Honaga b Shinjiro Otani; 5. Wild Pegasus b Tiger; 6. Riki Choshu & Hiroshi Hase b Tatsumi Fujinami & Keiji Muto; 7. IWGP tag team title: Hawk & Power Warrior b Rick & Scott Steiner; 8. IWGP jr. title tournament final: Honaga b Pegasus to win title; 9. IWGP hwt title: Shinya Hashimoto b Masa Chono

#### AAA ANNIVERSARY SHOW - SEPTEMBER 28

Site: Veracruz Auditorium

Live attendance: 10,000 sellout

Live gate: Unknown

1. Winners & Bali & Sugryva b Ravana & Picudo & Espectro; 2. El Mexicano & Mariachi & Charro de Jalisco b La Parka & Psicosis & Jerry Estrada; 3. Mixed minis match: Octagon & Rey Misterio Jr. & Octagoncito b Fuerza Guerrera & Juventud Guerrera & Fuercita Guerrera \*\*\*\*; 4. Love Machine & Blue Panther won over Universo 2000 & Tinieblas Jr. in seeding Battle Royal \*; 5. Hair vs. Hair: Heavy Metal b Tony Arce \*\*\*1/2; 6. Tinieblas Jr. & Tinieblas Sr. & Mascara Sagrada b Cien Caras & Mascara Ano 2000 & Universo 2000-DQ \*\*\*1/4; 7. AAA Cup finals: Panther & Perro Aguayo & El Hijo del Santo b Konnan El Barbaro & Love Machine & Chicano Power \*\*\*\*\*1/2

#### EMLL 61ST ANNIVERSARY SHOW - SEPTEMBER 30

Site: Arena Mexico

Live attendance: 9,000

Live gate: \$75,000

1. Shocker & Bronco b Cerebro & Guerrero Imperial; 2. Apolo Dantes (Alfonso Amezcua Jr.) & Brazo de Oro (Jose Alvarado) & Brazo de Plata (Jesus Alvarado) b Head Hunters (Victor & Manuel Santiago) & El Brazo (Juan Alvarado); 3. Emilio Charles Jr. (Sergio Charles Jr.) & Negro Casas b El Satanico & Miguel Perez; 4. Hair vs. hair: Silver King (Cesar Gonzalez) b Scorpio Sr. (Rafael Nunez Sr.) 1/4\*; 5. Hair vs. hair: Ricky Santana (Aldo Ortiz) b El Texano (Juan Aguilar) \*3/4

#### WWF ROUGEAU RETIREMENT SHOW - OCTOBER 21

Site: Montreal Forum

Live attendance: 16,843 sellout (15,534 paid)

Live gate: \$267,000 Canadian (\$214,000 U.S.)

1. Adam Bomb b Kwang (Juan Rivera) \*\*; 2. Luke Williams (Brian Wickens) & Butch Miller (Robert Miller) b Timothy Well & Steven Dunn 1/2\*; 3. IC title: Razor Ramon b Jeff Jarrett \*\*\*1/2; 4. IRS b Bob Holly (Robert Howard) \*; 5. WWF title: Bret Hart b Jim Neidhart \*\*\*; 6. Casket match: Undertaker b Yokozuna \*\*\*; 7. Diesel b Sionne (Sionne Vailahi) \*; 8. Jacques Rougeau b Pierre Oulette \*\*\*\*1/4

#### ALL JAPAN BUDOKAN HALL - OCTOBER 22

Site: Tokyo Budokan Hall

Live attendance: 16,300 sellout

Live gate: Est. \$1 million

1. Ryukaku Izumida b Masao Inoue; 2. Satoru Asako & Kentaro Shiga b Chris Candido & The Falcon; 3. Mighty Inoue & Haruka Eigen & Masa Fuchi b Rusher Kimura & Mitsuo Momota & Yoshinari Ogawa; 4. Johnny Ace & Dan Spivey & Doug Furnas b Jun Akiyama & Takao Omori & Tamon Honda; 5. PWF jr. title: Dan Kroffat b Tsuyoshi Kikuchi; 6. Giant Baba & Jumbo Tsuruta (Tomomi Tsuruta) & Dory Funk b The Eagle & Johnny Smith & Tom Zenk; 7. Mitsuharu Misawa & Stan Hansen b Kenta Kobashi & Akira Taue 28:22 \*\*\*\*1/2; 8. Triple Crown: Toshiaki Kawada b Steve Williams to win title 37:58 \*\*\*\*

#### WCW HALLOWEEN HAVOC - OCTOBER 23

Site: Detroit Joe Louis Arena

Live attendance: 14,000 (8,595 paid)

Live gate: \$189,000

Approximate PPV buy rate: 0.97

Approximate PPV revenue: \$2.50 million

Observer poll results: Thumbs up 144 (31.8%), Thumbs down 227 (50.1%), In the middle 82 (18.1%)

Best match: Flair vs. Hogan 238, Rhodes vs. Anderson 49

Worst match: Sullivan vs. Sullivan 224, Badd vs. Honkytonk 34

1. WCW TV title: Johnny B. Badd d Honkytonk Man (Roy Farris) 10:00 \*1/4; 2. WCW tag titles: Paul Orndorff & Paul Roma b Marcus Bagwell & The Patriot 13:47 \*\*1/4; 3. Dave Sullivan (Bill Dannenhauser) b Kevin Sullivan-COR 5:17 DUD; 4. Dustin Rhodes b Arn Anderson 9:50 \*\*\*1/4; 5. U.S. title: Jim Duggan b Steve Austin-DQ 8:02 \*\*; 6. Vader b Guardian Angel 8:17 \*\*3/4; 7. Nasty Boys b Terry Funk & Bunkhouse Buck 7:56 \*; 8. Cage match loser must retire for WCW title: Hulk Hogan b Ric Flair 19:25 \*\*\*\*1/4

#### NEW JAPAN TAG TOURNAMENT FINALS - OCTOBER 30

Site: Tokyo Sumo Hall

Live attendance: 11,500 sellout

Live gate: Est. \$570,000



1. Tadao Yasuda b Tatsuhiro Takaiwa; 2. Steve Regal b Osamu Kido; 3. Yuji Nagata & Tatsumi Fujinami b Yoshiaki Fujiwara & Yuki Ishikawa; 4. Shinya Hashimoto & Manabu Nakanishi b Akira Nogami & Takayuki Iizuka; 5. Playoff to reach tournament final: Super Strong Machine & Masa Chono b Hawk & Power Warrior; 6. IWGP jr. hwt title: Norio Honaga b Shinjiro Otani; 7. Rick & Scott Steiner b Ron Simmons & Scott Norton; 8. SG tag tourney final match no time limit: Hiroshi Hase & Keiji Muto b Machine & Chono 26:01

#### AAA/IWC WHEN WORLDS COLLIDE - NOVEMBER 6

Site: Los Angeles Sports Arena

Live attendance: 13,500 (12,024 paid)

Live gate: \$202,465

Approximate PPV buy rate: 0.24

Approximate PPV revenue: \$400,000

Observer poll results: Thumbs up 449 (98.0%), Thumbs down 5 (1.1%), In the middle 4 (0.9%)

Best match: Santo & Octagon vs. Machine & Guerrero 323, Konnan vs. Aguayo 51

Worst match: Santana & Pegasus & Scorpio vs. Panther & Parka & Estrada 83, Konnan vs. Aguayo 55

1. Mascarita Sagrada & Octagoncito b Jerrito Estrada & Espectrito 8:46 \*\*\*\*; 2. Fuerza Guerrera & Madonna's Boyfriend (Louis Mucciolo) & Psicosis b Rey Misterio Jr. & Heavy Metal & Latin Lover 12:54 \*\*\*\*; 3. Pegasus Kid (Chris Benoit) & Too Cold Scorpio & Tito Santana (Merced Solis) b Blue Panther & La Parka & Jerry Estrada 14:51 \*\*\*1/2; 4. Double mask vs. double hair: Octagon & El Hijo del Santo b Love Machine & Eddy Guerrero 22:29 \*\*\*\*\*; 5. Cage match: Perro Aguayo b Konnan El Barbaro 17:54 \*\*\*1/2

#### WCW CLASH OF THE CHAMPIONS - NOVEMBER 16

Site: Jacksonville Coliseum

Live attendance: 4,000 (3,200 paid)

Live gate: \$38,000

TV rating: 3.6

Observer poll results: Thumbs up 22 (9.0%), Thumbs down 203 (83.2%), In the middle 19 (7.8%)

Best match: Vader vs. Rhodes 172

Worst match: Duggan vs. Austin 77, Hogan & Sting & Sullivan vs. Sullivan & Butcher & Avalanche 53

1. WCW tag title: Marcus Bagwell & The Patriot b Paul Roma & Paul Orndorff to win titles 9:20 \*\*1/4; 2. WCW TV title: Johnny B. Badd b Honkytonk Man-DQ 6:14 1/4\*; 3. Harlem Heat b Nasty Boys 10:55 \*; 4. Vader b Dustin Rhodes 11:46 \*\*\*1/2; 5. U.S. title: Jim Duggan b Steve Austin-DQ :58 DUD; 6. Hulk Hogan & Sting & Dave Sullivan b Kevin Sullivan & Avalanche (John Tenta) & Butcher (Ed Leslie) 11:07 \*1/4

#### ALL JAPAN WOMEN BIG EGG UNIVERSE - NOVEMBER 20

Site: Tokyo Dome

Live attendance: 42,500

Live gate: \$4.3 million

1. Chapparita Asari & Bomber Hikari b Hiroumi Yagi & Hiroumi Sugo 6:53 \*\*1/2; 2. Midget handicap match: Great Little Muta (Okamoto) & Buta Genjin (Hiroshi Senyama) b Tsunokake X (Atsushi Tsunokake) 4:44 3/4\*; 3. Japanese jr. title: Candy Okutsu b Rie Tamada 8:52 \*\*\*1/4; 4. Suzuka Minami b Kaoru 9:35 \*\*\*1/2; 5. Kick boxing shoot match: Kumiko Maekawa b Sugar Miyuki; 6. Amateur shoot match: Doris Blind b Kyoko Hamaguchi; 7. Amateur shoot match: Miyu Yamamoto b Ana Gomez; 8. Shootboxing shoot match: Fumiko Ishimoto b Kaoru Ito; 9. Chigusa Nagayo b Reggie Bennett 8:39 \*\*; 10. Shinobu Kandori & Mikiko Futagami b Toshiyo Yamada & Tomoko Watanabe 11:30 \*\*\*\*; 11. UWA tag team titles: Etsuko Mita & Mima Shimoda b Yasha Kurenai & Michiko Nagashima 15:36 \*\*\*1/2; 12. Jaguar Yokota (Rimi Yokota) & Bison Kimura (Nobuko Kimura) d Yumi Ogura & Lioness Asuka (Tomoko Kitamura) 11:00 \*\*\*3/4; 13. Blizzard Yuki (Sakie Hasegawa) b Mariko Yoshida 12:03 \*\*\*\*; V<sub>8</sub> tournament first round 14. Combat Toyoda b Yumiko Hotta 16:55 \*\*\*3/4; 15. Akira Hokuto b Eagle Sawai 11:08 \*\*\*1/2; 16. Aja Kong b Manami Toyota 17:19 \*\*\*\*\*; 17. Dynamite Kansai b Kyoko Inoue 17:39 \*\*\*\*1/2; 18. Megumi Kudo & Hikari Fukuoka b Takako Inoue & Cutie Suzuki 14:04 \*\*\*1/2; 19. Great Sasuke & Sato (Shigeki Sato) & Shiryu b Ginsei Shinzaki (Kensuke Shinzaki) & Super Delfin & Gran Naniwa (Yoshikuni Kimura) 21:45 \*\*\*\*\*; V<sub>8</sub> tournament semifinals 20. Hokuto b Toyoda 5:48 \*\*\*1/4; 21. Kong b Kansai 12:24 \*\*\*1/2; 22. WWF womens title: Bull Nakano b Alundra Blayze to win title 9:27 \*\*1/4; 23. V<sub>8</sub> Tournament final: Hokuto b Kong to win tournament 20:24 \*\*\*3/4

#### WWF SURVIVOR SERIES - NOVEMBER 23

Site: San Antonio Freeman Coliseum

Live attendance: 10,000 (8,000 paid)

Live gate: Est. \$120,000

Approximate buy rate: 0.9

Approximate PPV revenue: \$2.32 million

Observer poll results: Thumbs up 113 (39.8%), Thumbs down 132 (46.5%), In the middle 39 (13.7%)

Best match: Backlund vs. Hart 141, Ramon's team vs. Michaels' team 43

Worst match: Lawler's team vs. Doink's team 179, Backlund vs. Hart 26

1. Razor Ramon & 1-2-3 Kid & Davey Boy Smith (David Smith) & Head Shrinkers (Sionne Vailahi & Solofa Fatu) b Shawn Michaels & Diesel & Owen Hart & Jim Neidhart & Jeff Jarrett 21:45 \*1/2; 2. Jerry Lawler & Queasy & Sleazy & Cheesy b Doink & Dink & Pink & Wink 16:05 - \*\*1/2; 3. WWF title Coward waves the flag match: Bob Backlund b Bret Hart to win title 35:11 \*\*; 4. Tatanka & Bam Bam Bigelow & King Kong Bundy (Chris Pallies) & Tom Prichard & Jimmy Del Rey b Lex Luger & Mabel & Adam Bomb & Billy (Kipp Sopp) & Bart Gunn (Mike Plotcheck) 23:21 \*\*1/2; 5. Casket match: Undertaker b Yokozuna 15:24 \*\*1/2

#### ALL JAPAN TAG TOURNEY FINALS - DECEMBER 10

Site: Tokyo Budokan Hall

Live attendance: 16,300 sellout

Live gate: Approx \$1 million

1. Masao Inoue b Kentaro Shiga; 2. Rusher Kimura & Mitsuo Momota & Yoshinari Ogawa b Mighty Inoue & Haruka Eigen & Masa Fuchi; 3. Dory Funk & Johnny Smith b The Eagle & The Falcon; 4. Dan Spivey & Jim Steele b Ryukaku Izumida & Tamon Honda; 5. Dan Kroffat & Doug Furnas b Satoru Asako & Tsuyoshi Kikuchi; 6. Jun Akiyama & Takao Omori b Abdullah the Butcher & Giant Kimala II; 7. Mitsuharu Misawa & Kenta Kobashi b Steve Williams & Johnny Ace 25:05 \*\*\*\*3/4; 8. Giant Baba & Stan Hansen b Toshiaki Kawada & Akira Taue 26:30 \*\*\*\* (Misawa & Kobashi win '94 tournament with 7-0-2 record)

#### UFC IV REVENGE OF THE WARRIORS - DECEMBER 16

Site: Tulsa Expo Square Pavilion

Live attendance: 5,857 sellout

Live gate: \$140,000

Approximate PPV buy rate: 0.9

Approximate PPV revenue: \$1.86 million

Observer poll results: Thumbs up 123 (86.0%), Thumbs down 7 (4.9%), In the middle 13 (9.1%)

Best match: Gracie vs. Severn 83, Bowen vs. Jennum 7

Worst match: Hackney vs. Son 30, Severn vs. Bossett 8

1. Royce Gracie b Ron Van Clief 3:49; 2. Keith Hackney b Joe Son 2:42; 3. Steve Jennum b Melton Bowen 4:47; 4. Dan Severn b Anthony Macias 1:45; 5. Gracie b Hackney 5:34; 6. Severn b Marcus Bossett :52; 7. Non-tournament qualifying match: Guy Mezger b Jason Fairn; 8. Gracie b Severn to win tournament 15:49

#### EMLL YEAR END SPECTACULAR - DECEMBER 16

Site: Mexico City Arena Mexico

Live attendance: 7,000

Live gate: Unknown

1. Felino & Guerrero Maya & Damian El Guerrero b Blue Demon Jr. & El Hijo del Solitario & Mascara Magica; 2. Bestia Salvaje & Mano Negra & El Hijo del Gladiador b Negro Casas & Dandy (Roberto Gutierrez Frias) & Kato Kung Lee Jr.; 3. Mil Mascaras (Aaron Rodriguez) & Corazon de Leon (Chris Irvine) & Vampiro Canadiense b Pierroth Jr. & Dr. Wagner Jr. (Manuel Gonzales Jr.) & Gran Markus Jr.; CMLL tag title deciding match: Silver King & El Texano b Emilio Charles Jr. & El Satanico; Hair vs. hair: La Fiera (Arturo Casco) b Black Magic (Norman Smiley)

#### KING OF PANCRASE TOURNAMENT FINALS - DECEMBER 17

Site: Tokyo Sumo Hall

Live attendance: 11,500 sellout

Live gate: Est. \$570,000

1. Katsoumi Inagaki b Gregory Smitt; 2. Scott Bessac b Papadorov; Tournament semifinals 3. Wayne Shamrock (Ken Shamrock) b Masakatsu Funaki 5:50; 4. Manabu Yamada b Minoru Suzuki 14:46; 5. Shamrock b Yamada 3-0 via judges decision after 30:00 draw

#### CWA EURO-CATCH FESTIVAL '94 - DECEMBER 17

Site: Bremen Sports Halle, Germany

Live crowd: 5,000

Live gate: Est. \$200,000

1. Hiroyoshi Yamamoto b Too Cold Scorpio 13:16 \*\*; 2. Ulf Hermann & August Smisl & Ice Train b John Hawk & Cannonball Grizzly (Paul Neu) & Danny Collins \*1/2; 3. Steve Wright b Hias Meyer DUD; 4. Masa Chono b Tony St. Clair 21:04 \*\*\*\*; 5. CWA IC title: David Finlay b Doink the Clown (Steve Keirn) 22:45 \*\*\*; 6. CWA middleweight title: Franz Schumann b Dick Slater 20:04 \*\*1/2; 7. CWA hwt title: Rambo (Luc Poirier) b Big Titan 16:59 \*1/4

#### WCW STARRCADE '94 - DECEMBER 27

Site: Nashville Municipal Auditorium

Live crowd: 8,200 sellout (6,400 paid)

Live gate: \$82,000

Approximate PPV buy rate: 0.6

Approximate PPV revenue: \$1.55 million

Observer poll results: Thumbs up 19 (9.0%), Thumbs down 167 (79.1%), In the middle 25 (11.8%)

Best match: Nasty Boys vs. Harlem Heat 40, Vader vs. Jim Duggan 23

Worst match: Mr. T vs. Kevin Sullivan 83, Hulk Hogan vs. Butcher 18

1. U.S. title: Vader b Jim Duggan to win title 12:06 \*1/2; 2. Alex Wright b Jean Paul Levesque (Paul Levesque) 14:03 \*1/4; 3. WCW TV title: Johnny B. Badd b Arn Anderson 11:21 \*; 4. Nasty Boys b Harlem Heat-DQ 17:49 \*\*1/4; 5. Mr. T (Lawrence Teraud) b Kevin Sullivan 3:50 DUD; 6. Sting b Avalanche-DQ 15:26 1/4\*; 7. WCW title: Hulk Hogan b The Butcher 12:07 3/4\*